





LESSONS OF FAITH AND LIFE.

DISCOURSES

BY
E. H. CHAPIN.

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NEW YORK:

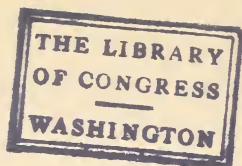
JAMES MILLER, PUBLISHER,

647 BROADWAY.

1877.

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*Stereotyped and printed by
Rand, Avery, and Company,
117 Franklin Street,
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TO
THE CONGREGATION
WORSHIPPING IN
THE CHURCH OF THE DIVINE PATERNITY,
NEW YORK,

This Volume of Discourses

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR PASTOR,

E. H. CHAPIN.

PREFACE.

THIS volume hardly requires a preface. It consists of a few discourses selected from many that I have preached in this city during my ministry here of almost thirty years. They have been copied for the press from manuscripts in which some of the passages were fully written out, while in other instances I have endeavored to recover the substance of my remarks from fragmentary notes. These discourses have been arranged without regard to the relation of subjects. I need not add that they probably contain nothing new; but I hope they may be found to express needed although familiar truth. They are simply what they profess to be, — “Lessons of Faith and Life.” They are now committed to those, who, having heard them, may desire to receive them again in this form, and to any who may think fit to read them; and I pray that God will make them useful.

E. H. CHAPIN.

NEW YORK, Dec. 8, 1876.

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DISCOURSES.

I.

THE TRANSFIGURING LOOK.

“And as he prayed the fashion of his countenance was altered.”
— LUKE ix. 29.

WHATEVER view we may adopt concerning the nature of Jesus, and however distinctly we may recognize the supernatural elements involved with his earthly life, it is hardly necessary to affirm that the incidents of his personal history, as recorded in the Evangelists, had a human side. They indicate some possibility of human experience. It is thus with the incident described in the text. It was, in a special sense, a transfiguration. We may say that it involved a condition never expressed in any merely human life. But as in Jesus we behold the highest ideal of humanity, so in this act of transfiguration — though in a more glorious and exalted way — he represents and illustrates something which takes place in man, — in every man, whenever he assumes

the highest posture of his nature, and gives expression to the deepest convictions of the human soul. As Jesus prayed there on the mount, "the fashion of his countenance was altered." And so we may say that, as man prays,—or, in other words, as in any posture man comes in contact with the great realities of religion and of the soul, and expresses his relation to these,—the fashion of *his* countenance alters, the look of humanity is transfigured. And this is the thought that I propose to illustrate in the present discourse.

Perhaps there is no test so ready and so sure of what is in a man, either of fixed character or transient sentiment, as his own face. It is curious to see how hidden and fleeting thoughts will cast reflections of themselves upon this wondrous mirror. To some extent this tendency may be controlled by art, as it is said to have been in the case of Napoleon. But it is likely that there will be some aspect or motion—some uncontrollable flicker of the eye—which will open a chink into the secret cabinet of the heart. So you may trace the under-current of passion rippling in the cheek of courtesy, and detect the lewd nature peering through unsuspected masks. How plainly will a mean motive skulk in the front of affected carelessness, while an instinctive counsel within us challenges a man's words by his looks. On the other hand, consider how marvellously people are transfigured by high and holy sentiments. You

hardly recognize the homely features, or the clumsy shape, when an eloquent thought, or a great truth, shoots like an aurora into the countenance, and sets its star-light in the eyes. The puny form dilates with a heroic purpose, and the plain and even coarse face, lit up with benevolence as it bends over the bed of sickness and pain, becomes beautiful as an angel's.

But if the fashion of a man's countenance is thus flexible to the transient currents of his inner life, it receives a more permanent stamp from his substantial character. The faces of men may be read like books, and present symbolic title-pages of their essential life. That in which a man lives, and for which he hankers, — the plane and standard of his being, — appears in unmistakable lineaments. As his image may be transferred to clay or marble, so his countenance is only a flesh-and-blood cast of his spirit. Who cannot discern the sensualist's ideal in that expression of exuberant desire? Avarice, miserliness, hard, grinding requisition, are they not all projected in that countenance, as it were not of skin and bone, but of parchment and bullion? And then how the heart of love swims to the surface, and the overflow of a sweet generosity glorifies the aspect! You may be able to suspect from many a professor's face when he has more creed than religion, as you can also see whose soul walks higher than condemning dogmas; among great charities and holy thoughts.

And now, if men are thus moulded, or transfigured, by their inmost ideals, it is a matter of interest for us to consider the expression of humanity at large under the inspiration of sincere religious faith. I say at once, then, that it is the *highest* expression of humanity. I affirm that there is no mode of action, no posture of being, so grand, so hopeful, so pregnant with suggestion, as that of man praying,—one in whom culminates the fullest expression of Christian belief and service. It is a *transfiguring look*, which lifts him above all sin and frailty and dust and shadow, and exhibits him as a child of God and an heir of immortality. Higher than any mere intellectual achievement is this uplifting and surrender of the soul. Newton grasping the firmament in his thought is not so sublime a spectacle as Newton when he kneels and adores. And as to the most insignificant or miserable man,—the beggar, and the penitent thief, and the little child, and the soldier trampled in the bloody mire of the battlefield, and the unconsidered unit clinging like a barnacle to the hull of civilization, and the daughter of shame withering in the street,—as to each and all, I say that when they pray the fashion of their countenance is altered, the husk of their mortality cleaves open, and they assume an expression of indescribable dignity.

And as with individual instances, so with the collective humanity. Its supreme expression is in the

act of faith and worship. Upon this earth there is no sight so suggestive and inspiring as the spectacle of a congregation gathered, as we have gathered here to-day, in acknowledgment of an Infinite Power, of a Goodness that is over all, in the expression of dependence upon a Supreme Helper, in a sense of unseen and eternal realities. Wherever men this day assume the posture of religious trust and reverence, looking upward to the Invisible, — in the simple meeting-house, where the silver hairs of village saints, and the toil-worn hands of husbandmen, and the patient look of matrons, and the faces of little children blend in a sweet and solemn service, and groups, passing homeward through ranks of tombstones, read their lines of immortal hope gleaming through the grass, and look calmly on the places where they shall sleep in “the country churchyard;” and in cities, where congregations sit without utterance, waiting the summons of the Spirit, or where with much ceremony litanies are chanted and censers swung, and the organ’s divine thunder rolls through a thousand hearts, — wherever to-day humanity heaves with the great ground-swell of religion, and all outward distinctions dissolve in the light of spiritual relations, — I say that *there* this humanity is transfigured: it is lifted above its sins and miseries and frailty, and all that gives occasion for sceptical distrust. For as man prays — as his nature assumes its highest expression — the shadows

of his mortality disappear, and the fashion of his countenance is altered.

But we may go farther than this. Even in heathen lands, even in shapes of terror and of folly, we recognize the working of an element in man that exalts him far above the beast of the field, and suggests his relationship to things that can never die. For what *is* this perverted sentiment, grossly perverted, working out in such deplorable results? what is this sentiment that has such perpetuity and power? What is it, if not an instinct of our nature that has groaned and writhed under a sense of the Invisible, — that has built rock temples, and carved hideous gods, and impelled men to cut the tenderest chords of nature, to lacerate themselves, to mutilate themselves, to cast themselves into the flood and the fire, and that has darkened the earth and the sky and the heart of man with drifting shapes of superstition? Why, I say that this power, from the lowest point of its scale to the highest, from the African grovelling before his shapeless idol, up to Luther discerning through ranks of priests and kings the presence of his God, up to Paul counting all things as loss for the sake of Christ, — I say that this power transfigures man, and forbids those low conclusions to which sometimes theoretically, and much more often practically, we consent.

Yes, for this religious sentiment, thus fearfully perverted, I claim a legitimate function. It must

have a normal office, or it could not be a *perverted* sentiment. It cannot be a factitious element: it has not been superinduced upon our nature. I claim that it is an authentic instinct and function of the soul.

But if this sentiment of religion, this sense of the Invisible, is legitimate, then it must have reference to real objects; else it is exceptional among all other functions of our nature. As we have no faculties without a purpose, without corresponding objects, as for the eye and the hand there are external things to be seen and touched, so for this religious organ, just as veritable as the hand or the eye, there exist external realities to which it refers. For one thing, there is a God to be sought and loved and adored: and so this familiar act of a man praying transfigures him from a material puppet into an immortal soul; from mere kinship with the brute, into a child of the infinite Father. I ask, then, in all our speculations, have we duly considered what this act of prayer, or any other posture of religious faith, really means? Have we considered what it demonstrates, and also what it contradicts?

Even at the risk of some repetition, let me specify that which has now been generally suggested.

I. I observe, then, in the first place, that the very attitude of religious faith contradicts sceptical theories of human nature. In trying to estimate the worth and the purpose of any being, it seems reasonable

that we should adopt for our standard the highest manifestations of that being. As an illustration of my meaning, I remark that we estimate any individual man, not by what he may be doing at any specified time, not by the weakness or failure of some particular occasion, but by what he has done in his *highest* moods, what he is capable of doing at his *best*. We do not expect that Demosthenes will always give us an "Oration for the Crown," that Shakspeare will always write a "Hamlet," or Tennyson an "In Memoriam." But surely it is by these productions, and not their poorest, that we rate such men. We measure their calibre by their broadest circle of achievement, and stamp the recognition of genius upon that which they have done, and can do, in the full swell of their powers. Now apply this illustration to classes of being. Concerning the brute we commonly say, that, in his highest manifestations, he shows no capacity for any state beyond this earth. In his career there is no progress, at least his achievement betrays no illimitable faculty, his eyes drink in no great depths of space, and kindle with no speculation. With all his sagacity and tractability he is, nevertheless, brutal. But it is not so with man. Strike out of the question, so far as the present discussion is concerned, all the splendid achievements of the human intellect, admit that the mind of Plato or La Place is of the same sort as the mind of the mastiff or the elephant, and that, therefore, they are

involved in a common destiny, still, in man there is something that is not in the animal, something that does not run on the same plane with his instinct, or, if you will call it so, his intellect; and that something is this religious sentiment, this transfiguring element, which flows upward towards God, and breaks forth in the clear-shining of faith, and mounts in prayer. Even if it be found that this distinction between man and the brute does not exist, and that in the animal also there are germs of religious sentiment, this would not balk the inference. It would only enlarge the possibilities of the brute.

I maintain that we should estimate the significance of man by that in him which is highest. Is this being, then, who aspires to eternal things, a mere clod of earth? Is he who conceives and feels after God only a form of matter? We are not to illustrate his capacity by the grossest and meanest aspects of humanity. It may be difficult to argue the spiritual dignity and the immortal destiny of mankind, if we select our tests anywhere and everywhere. It is hard, indeed, to kindle high hopes for the race, if you turn the light upon the face of the degraded savage, or the more degraded drunkard. We may rake the kennels of society, and rip up the swarms of filth and ferocity that go by the name of "men." We may take the idiot, the debauchee, the fop, the accomplished scoundrel, — all head and no principle, nothing but cold brain-light, down to the empty

socket of his heart; we may take a libertine, a tempter of his brother's soul, a corrupt politician, a thousand disheartening forms of humanity that pass by us every day; nay, we may take the weakness and the sins even of good men, and upon all this we may erect a formidable superstructure of scepticism, and scoff at the notion of man's religious nature and his immortal destiny. But this is not the standard. Your scepticism does not comprehend *all* the tests. As in the case of the individual, so in regard to mankind at large, we must judge not by the lowest, but by the highest. There are all these disheartening phases of humanity; but here, also, are these glorious instances. There are fools and knaves and tyrants and sensualists; there are such as Caligula and Benedict Arnold and George IV.: but here, also, are Pauls and Fénelons and Florence Nightingales; here are men and women writing a Christian martyrology in letters of blood and fire on the walls of amphitheatres; here are Latimers and Riddleys holding unblenching hands in the flame; here are Pilgrims clasping Bibles to their breasts as they sail over stormy seas. Nay, let us get away from these scenic instances of history, here, right around you, are poor widows in bare garrets, kneeling, with God-seeing eyes; here are oppressed and suffering men clinging to their simple belief in an infinite Helper, and feeling the consolation of Jesus breathing upon their sorrow; here are poor brethren

of ours, pressed by grievous temptations, lifting up their souls to Him who can make them strong in their moral conflict, and with swift strokes of supplication cleaving down help from the Almighty. Here is a man called to lie down and die, leaving a sick wife, leaving little helpless children; feeling the mortal terror creeping inward to his heart, as the mortal agony creeps over his flesh; but still looking up to the Father, laying hold of immortality, and in that one touch of faith making the coarse sheet that soon is to be his shroud more glorious with heaven's light than the hearse of Napoleon, rumbling through the streets of Paris and blossoming with a hundred victories. In such, in a thousand ways, here is the spectacle of man praying, — man summoning faith and devotion, and taking hold of unconquerable strength, lifted into unfading light; and, I ask, what do you make of this? I maintain that thus estimating humanity by its highest, not by its lowest attitudes, this weak, sinning, dying creature refutes all sceptical conclusions, and the fashion of its countenance is altered.

II. I proceed to observe, in the next place, that in this expression of our nature we find a refutation of any extreme claim of action as opposed to worship, and also of science as setting itself in the place of religion. I touch the point of suggestion here, by asking why we have come together in this place to-day? Is it not in a persuasion that man must

pray as well as work, — that he cannot depend merely upon his own resources, but must look up for Infinite help? But are there not those who say that all forms of worship are obsolete; that prayer is a superstition fit only for the ignorant and weak, and that, after all, the only true prayer is work; that true manliness depends upon itself, and does not look away for help? Now, in this assumption doubtless there is some truth. It hits some points of positive error. It shows the impracticability of absolute fatalism, which leaves no room for human effort. It justly rebukes reliance upon mere forms of devotion without corresponding action. But, on the other hand, it overlooks the irrepressible *instinct* of prayer. It does not allow for the fact that man needs inspiration for his work, and that the individual advances and the race advances by ideals as well as by endeavors. The area of human vision is a condition of its power, and the strongest men the world has ever known are men who have risen from their knees to their feet. Indeed, if we shut out those realities which come into the horizon of prayer, the aspect of man's work upon the earth, of his efforts and struggles, is sad and doubtful. But by that revelation which he discerns in communion with God and unseen things, his hopes are confirmed, his trials are interpreted, his aspirations and his labors become significant, and the fashion of his countenance is altered. I have sometimes looked out upon the sea, stretching in one sweep of mystery

far around, and without a boundary save the horizon, But, in all its aspects of grandeur and of beauty, to me nothing appears so suggestive as the sight of the vessels moving upon it, and, as they go, catching the glory of sunlight upon their sails. For so, I think, is the world itself,—a great deep of beauty and fearfulness and mystery, shut in by an irresolvable horizon. And we should have far less hope for the moving hulks of our endeavor,—for this great ship of human interests,—were it not for the glory reflected from beyond and above, were it not for that open vista through which streams sunlight upon the sails.

Action, then, cannot occupy the place of prayer. As the very motive power of our action, we need the inspiration and the vision which are revealed to faith.

Nor can science be substituted for religion. The soul of man requires a light that we cannot find through the telescope, or at the end of the galvanic wire. It cannot rest or be satisfied with the mere discernment of natural laws. It cannot steer through the mystery of life with no other chart than the physical constitution of man. It needs a heavenly Father and a redeeming Christ. For religion is not a mere fancy or tradition. We may declare it obsolete, but it cannot be uprooted from human nature. In short, man needs the gospel. Here stands Jesus, occupying a place which no other has filled or can

fill. Christ the revealer, Christ the glorified, Christ the transfigured, represents something without ourselves and above ourselves. He presents a point of reconciliation between the human and the divine, that no one else — no Plato, no Socrates, no oracle of scientific truth, no modern type of philanthropy — can give. In the light which streams upon us from the personality of Jesus the fashion of man's countenance is altered.

III. In closing, let me say that the fact which we have been considering, not only refutes false theoretical, but unworthy *practical*, conclusions. The realities which are assumed in this posture of faith and worship — the realities to which the spirit of man ascends, and with which it holds communion — rebuke all low and selfish and indifferent ways of living. And, after all, this is the most imminent danger, not that we shall deliberately form atheistic *opinions*, but that we shall abide in atheistic *conclusions*. Opinions are the result of reasoning, and are amenable to the force of reason; but the fascinations of sense, the pressure of visible and tangible things, more than intellectual disbelief, confirm men in an apathetic worldliness that can be broken only by touching the springs of spiritual consciousness, and rousing the forces of the will. At least, it is desirable that we should spring a bridge from our thoughts to our actions. *Thinking* as many, perhaps as most of us do, giving at least a passive assent to

the reality of spiritual things, do we still live as though these things were not? On the other hand, *living* as many do, I urge them to think back to the premises that justify such living. Construct, in theory, a universe that will justify profaneness or licentiousness, meanness and fraud, lack of principle and lack of love. How awful the system of things in which such lives would be logical conclusions! A universe in which there are no foundations of "eternal and immutable morality," no source for divine light like that which shone upon Jesus and from Jesus on the mount of transfiguration! And we only phantoms of a day, groping among the tombstones of elder generations, re-animating their forsaken vanities, and with our measure of life-breath blowing out their collapsed and withered sins! Living as many do, I repeat, think back to such a system as this, and thus live logically.

But if we are children of God and heirs of immortality, what then should be the scope and standard of our lives? Oh, my brethren! if there *is* a world from which a supernatural splendor fell upon the face of the praying Jesus,—if there *was* such a Jesus, revealing such things to men,—if these things are *real*,—it is not merely the fashion of man's countenance that alters, but the entire fashion of human life! Then, not those things concerning which men think and act as though they really made up the substance of our being, but those we seek for

and cling to in solemn moments, in our best hours and in our last, — these are the supreme, the eternal fashion, all else being uncertain and perishable.

Moreover, these consecrate all good and true things, even in our common lot and work. The light from above, the light from within, by which the fashion of man's countenance is altered, shines in both directions. It guides us *downward* from the mountain-height of meditation and prayer, even as Jesus went down to work and duty. And this light also shines *upward*, disclosing those spiritual realities with which our essential being is implicated. I ask again, If that light be *real*, what is the logical, the simple, the practical conclusion? Why, that we awake, and live in that transfiguring revelation.

II.

THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE.

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” — 2 Cor. iv. 18.

THESE words form a part of that grand passage of consolation which the Apostle Paul mingles with a recital of his sufferings for the gospel's sake. In doing the work to which he was called, he had pursued a career of peril and persecution. But the dangers which dashed around him only exposed the rocky solidity of his faith; the sacrifices which lay in his way proved the integrity of his purpose. He tells us that he was “troubled on every side, yet not distressed;” “perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” He was able to call his heaviest trial a “light affliction,” and saw how the transient event of the hour was working out for him “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

In the words before us the apostle makes known the source of all this strength. He was able thus to do and endure, because he recognized those eternal

realities upon which all present conditions are based, or into which all present conditions subside. Why should he *not* be confident? Why should he not be victorious? Why should he fear stripes and imprisonment, and principalities and powers? Why should he despair, or feel forsaken, when he was so sure that "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"?

The Second Epistle of Paul to the church of Corinth is the most personal, the most pregnant with his own peculiar thoughts and feelings, of all those remarkable letters that bear his name. In the course of this epistle he tells us of his joys and sorrows, his anxieties and consolations. In his relations to this particular church there had been much to excite these solitudes, much to awaken his thankfulness and trust. But from these personal and temporary conditions emerges the truth which is permanent and universal. By the very intensity of his own private emotions the apostle mounts up into the realm of everlasting light and peace, where all earthly troubles melt away, and all the measurements of time dwindle to nothing. And thus Paul's experience of trial and suffering, which in one form or another come to all the children of men, leads to that margin of help and rest which is accessible to all.

"For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." This was

the truth which inspired and consoled the apostle Paul, and it may inspire you and me and every man. This truth, therefore, I now propose to consider:—

I. As a standard of power.

II. Of knowledge.

III. Of life.

I. I remark, then, that the truth proclaimed in the passage before us indicates the standard of true power. And, first of all, I say that it is an immeasurably *practical* truth. It might be supposed that this steadfast regard to things invisible would disturb the conditions and depreciate the claims of our ordinary life. But it is not so. On the contrary, this spiritual discernment, throwing all things into true relations, gives to each thing its real value. For instance, the man who habitually contemplates these permanent realities is delivered from any sceptical mood. The importance of all life, the inherent greatness of being, is to him made apparent. He cannot say concerning this thing, or that thing, that it is “all vanity;” for however slight it may be in itself, however transient in its operation, in one form or another it is the instrument or occasion of spiritual action. It expresses spiritual laws. He whose vision is limited to that which is *seen*, may easily fall into doubt and disparagement. To him, things may seem to have no purpose. He sees them

growing and decaying, appearing and vanishing, in a wearisome monotony of change. Let a man, for the time being, suppose himself to be utterly deprived of the vision of faith. In other words, let him suppose himself to be living only in the light of that which he sees. Take the great procession of human life; take that fitting representation of it which every day passes through yonder street, perpetually flowing, and, as it flows, bearing every mortal aspect from youth to age, from the mystery of birth to the mystery of death. Each particle in that mighty stream cherishes some purpose, aims at some end. Nevertheless, estimating all by the limits of time and sense, that purpose is brief, and that end is vain. And to what purpose, to what end, the great whole which composes this ceaseless river of humanity? To what purpose the successive generations that have rolled over the globe from the beginning until now, each characterized, perhaps, by some special form of achievement, each rising or sinking in the scale of civilization, each bequeathing something to the generations following? But why talk of generations? It is the *individual* only that is conscious of life, not any corporate humanity abstracted from individuals; and to each who has thus lived, and achieved, and suffered, to what purpose is it all?

Yes, it is the feeling of transitoriness, of limitation and perpetual change, that begets a scepticism which paralyzes effort, which finds no motive for putting

forth practical power, and writes "vanity" upon all things. But let this veil of time and sense be lifted; let the spiritual realities with which this procession of humanity is mingled be revealed; let each life in its individuality, and all lives as one great whole, be thrown into connection with the purposes of spiritual being, — and at once there is inspiration for our effort. "The things which are seen are temporal;" and, if the existence of man is involved with these alone, what object is there in lofty and self-sacrificing work? But encouragement for such endeavor is at once made manifest when we regard this lot of ours as involved with "the things which are not seen;" for "the things which are not seen are eternal."

Nor is the man who looks at "the things which are not seen" to be regarded as *visionary*, while he whose eyes are fixed upon "the things which are seen" is to be reckoned as the man of solid and practical sense. Quite otherwise. That man is not visionary who discerns things as they are, but he who lives in the illusion of a false or partial vision. And, I ask, whose vision *is* false, whose vision is partial, if not that of the man who discerns only "the things which are seen"? Do we call those men fanatics who believe in higher realities than any of this earth, and who measure things in the light of those realities? As well might we call those "fanatics" who work in the light of the sun, rather than those who live in narrow caverns, and who, assuming their limited arena

to be the scope of the universe, take shadows for substance, and grope in the dimness of perpetual twilight. He is not a fanatic who takes the broadest compass of being for the standard of things; but he *is* a fanatic who lives in the delusion of the senses, and the narrowness of his own conceit. Yes, there are fanatics of the senses, visionary worldlings, men who cling to the mere surface of things, who sacrifice life and the highest good of life for some object that perishes as they grasp it; who with a bit of coin hide all heaven from their own eyes, and who bury their souls in the limitations of the flesh as profoundly as any monk of La Trappe ever buried his body within stone walls. Even where there exists what is more popularly called "fanaticism," or, as we may term it, an excessive spirituality, a straining of the vision beyond that which is real into the regions of mystery and fancy, what, after all, is this but an inverted worldliness, the measuring of hidden things by sensuous standards, a conceit of human limitations distorting the Illimitable? A very different thing is this from that solemn apprehension of spiritual realities which men like Paul have entertained, and which led them to set every thing at its right value, and to see every thing in its right place. The most convincing testimony is that of fact. And, as the precise fact in the case, we know that such men have not been visionaries, but have wrought the great practical work of the world. They

have been men of toil and endurance, and have exerted those mighty forces which have changed the face of empires, and thrilled the heart of ages. Read the record in which, with a proper humility and yet for a proper purpose, the apostle, in this Second Epistle to the Corinthians, recounts his labors, his sacrifices, and his sufferings, a record of simple fact, a record of the achievements of one whose influence has gone abroad in the earth to immeasurable results,—read this, and then remember that the man who thus wrought and endured looked to “the things which are not seen,” and was able thus to do and to bear, *because* he looked to “the things which are unseen.”

We make a great mistake, if, by “practical men,” we designate only those who live upon a level with concrete realities, and hold by immediate facts; while, on the other hand, we regard those who look to an ideal, and strive to make it real, as visionaries. Thus, our “practical men” are the dollar-and-cent men, who rate all issues by the price-current, who balance trade against truth, and who cling to the most palpable abominations for fear that, by ripping them up, they would disturb the economy of worldly interest. Such as these would have kept the world anchored two thousand years back. Their vocation is with “the things which are seen.” But always it is that which is not seen that leads men forward, and through their action moves the world. It was some-

thing not yet seen for which Russell suffered, and Hampden fell. Things not seen hovered above the Pilgrims' stormy passage, and lit up the winter landscape around the Continentals' tents. Something not seen drew Columbus onward, and made Luther say, "Here stand I: I *cannot* otherwise. God help me!" Things not seen fired the apostle's heart, and bade him challenge the corruption of Corinth, and the pride of Athens. Judge ye, then, whether the visionary men, the impracticable men, have been those who have looked beyond things immediate and apparent, or those who have regarded only things immediate and apparent. Of course there is a fitness of conditions, and one should be reasonably assured that the end he seeks is a reality in the world of truth, and not a conceit of his own imagination. But I affirm that those, who, with clear vision, have looked to "the things which are not seen," of all men have been the least entitled to the name of "visionaries," and have of all men wielded the elements of practical power.

And I might proceed to show that all the highest kinds of power are unseen. In the material world, the things we see, even "the rock-ribbed and ancient hills," are only phenomena projected by energies which we do not see. Science finds it not difficult to trace back this planetary array of worlds to sheets of vapor, thinly spread out in space, and thus touches the threshold of the fact that "the things which are

seen were not made of things which do appear.' The corn and grape, out of what have they grown? Where is the mystery that was buried in the seed, and that has unfolded in the circles of the oak? The sap and root of all life in nature are unseen. And, in this human organism, where is the principle of life that moves the heart and drives the blood? No knife has ever laid it bare, no galvanic current has forced its secret. These great instruments of civilization, too, the printing-press, the steam-engine, the ship, — behind them all stands the inventor's *idea*, the builder's *thought*. The grandest actions, the mightiest endeavors, are they not inspired by unseen forces of thought and will? And He who is the life of all this life, the fountain of human thought, the explanation of human endeavor, Him no eye hath seen, or can see. When we look to the things which are not seen, we look to the sources of the highest power.

II. "For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." I observe, in the next place, that this truth suggests the standard of true *knowledge*. The most fatal hindrance to all knowledge is the conceit of present attainment. Our hope for all ignorance is grounded in its humility. Let any one assume that he needs to know no more, or that there is no more to be known, and all intellectual vitality departs from him. For this intellectual life consists in the consciousness

of perpetual acquisition and perpetual need. When our knowledge becomes a pond, instead of a river, it stagnates,—it stagnates unless it is continually fed. I do not assert that anybody consciously and deliberately assumes this position, that he knows all things, or that no more is to be known. But, in effect, how many *do* assume this position! In what practical forms this assumption breaks out! It is expressed, for instance, by him who virtually limits all truth to his own creed, or all right to his party, who regards every innovation as heretical, and every adverse argument as folly. Sometimes in political action men undertake to compress ideas into a definite organism. But truth will not be thus cramped and excluded. It heaves up in an irresistible groundswell, it oozes through planks and crannies, and splits political platforms into match-wood. In religious matters, men presume to call their position alone orthodox, compacted and settled for all time; and the inquiry that stretches beyond these barriers, the propositions that dispute this or that point, are pronounced presumptuous. What is this but a conceit of absolute knowledge? No, inquiry is not infidelity, the earnest utterance of conviction is not infidelity; but lack of faith in the illimitability and permanence of truth, lack of faith in the unseen, *is* infidelity.

At least a cure for such assumptions is found by looking to “the things which are not seen.” If the

immense region which lies outside our actual knowledge does not drive us to the conviction that will sometimes force itself upon wise minds, the conviction that we know nothing absolutely, at least it confirms the suggestion that we know but little, and that our knowledge is relative; which, if in some degree a humiliating, is also a profitable and consoling conclusion.

For who shall estimate the riches, the possibilities, that are hidden from our sight? — glories that lie all around the visible world, such as “eye hath not seen, . . . neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.” This earth on which we dwell, how fruitful is it in sources of astonishment! And yet, in the sweep of telescopic vision, our earth, with all that it contains, dwindles to an atom. But all this magnificent theatre of the visible is merely the vestibule of the invisible, while the entire physical creation is only the star-woven veil that hides those finer realities, with which, as yet, we are not fitted to hold communion. The unseen, — what unimaginable modes of being, what teeming energies, harbor in its bosom! And yet there are men who talk, and who live, as though all things lay open to the natural eye, as though their horizon were the limit of the universe; who define and decide as though the wonderful must be the untrue, as though there were no marvels in a bloodvessel or a nerve, as though their own conscious being were not linked with invisible relations.

And, passing into the region of our daily life, I ask, considering the conditions of our actual knowledge, is there not a suggestion and a caution as to how we decide upon the movements of Providence? For the works and the ways of God are intimately involved with "the things which are not seen;" and surely, in this consciousness of human limitation, there is ground not only for humility, but for trust and consolation. And this leads to the final head of this discourse.

III. "For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." I observe, that in this assertion is indicated the standard of true life. For man's true life is above the level of the senses. If, as we have just seen, it betrays a miserable condition of mental poverty for any man to assume that the scope of all knowledge is within the limits of that which he positively knows, what must be said concerning those who not only think thus, but *live* thus? They are absorbed in that which they can see and grasp, which yields only sensual delight, and endows them with nothing but material power. Surely this is not true human life. It is balked and dwarfed life. At the best it is but animal life. For the highest elements of our being are unseen elements. Such is the source from which we spring, the goal towards which we drift. That with which we are most intimately involved, in which we have the deepest interest, which sustains

us while we sleep, and flows in all the currents of our action, and rebukes or consecrates all we do, is not palpable, like our food or raiment or houses or money. It is unseen. And in a short time, at the longest, our bodily peculiarity and all that pertains thereto will drop as a garment, and we shall pass into the unseen. And if practically we neglect this truth we cannot truly live. I have already shown that this estimate of things that are not seen does not cause us to depreciate unduly the things which are seen. It only sets these visible objects in their right relations, and exposes their real value. As this earnest conviction of unseen realities is the spring of practical power and true knowledge, so is it the condition of the highest life.

That which we implicitly trust, that which we truly love, forms an essential constituent of our being. We may confidently say that much of any man's life is involved with that in which he trusts, and which he loves. But are not these unseen things? If they are not, then they are perishable things; and we are weak in our trust, as weak as are the sources of our strength and our delight. There is nothing that the eye sees, or the hand touches, that is not liable to change and to vanish. Is it some dear form of our affection? Do we garner in our hearts its mere earthly relations? Then we are weak in the frailty of that fond object, we are exposed in its liabilities, we plant our peace in that which is

uncertain, that which disease shatters, and time blights, and which may drop away like other fair and tender things, under the dark rain or the frost. Or do we trust in some outward possession of power, of reputation, of health or prosperity? Then are we the slaves of circumstance, and the counters of fortune.

I repeat, then, in proportion as we trust in that which is seen, we are weak in its weakness, and insecure in its uncertainty. And it is thus with whatever we truly love. Our affections are sure of their objects only as they intertwine themselves with the unseen, — not the mere bodily presence, but the deathless thought, the beauty of the soul, the wealth of immortal love, all recognized, but all unseen. Our possessions are firm when they become parts of ourselves, intrinsic elements of our spiritual but hidden nature. And he whose hope is anchored in heaven, and whose reliance is upon God, is entangled with no uncertainty, and fears neither the hostility nor the failure of earthly things. Such has been the trust, such the love, of those who have most nobly filled the compass of a true life; Paul, for instance, who was so strong in all his trials, and so victorious, because, said he, “we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” And let me once again press home upon you his *reason* for this choice: “For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” I

urge you to form a right conception of this statement. Do not abide in the conceit that the things which are not seen by and by *will* be seen, and that the difference between these and the things which are *now* seen is only a difference of space and time. The things which are eternal never can be seen, because they do not belong to the category of sensuous objects. They are spiritual things. You never can see the right, the good, the true. Only expressions, or external symbols of these, come before the bodily eye. The things which are seen are, by their intrinsic conditions, perishable. Sensuously perceived, they have a sensuous destiny. Nothing on which you can place your eye is permanent. In periods longer or shorter it changes, and passes away,—the roof that covers you, as well as the body in which you are enshrined; the stone that may mark where you lie, as well as the pyramids, the populous city through which you now walk, the mountains, and the sea. Paul looked through and looked beyond all such things. He knew that Corinth, with all its power and all its splendid corruption, would pass away, but not the truth which he preached. That pertained to the things which are invisible. The decrees of Cæsars, the persecutions of governors, the bloody arena, the chains, and the scourge, he cared not for them: they were temporal, they were as nothing compared with those great objects on which his eyes, his in-

ward vision of faith, were fixed, — the unseen God, Christ, and the glorious crown — unseen, for these are eternal. “The things which are seen are temporal.” Let us keep the antithesis fairly balanced. “Surely,” we may be ready to say, “these are the most familiar things, — the well-known objects of our old home, the earth, the flowers, the sunlight, the sea, those forms and aspects that delight our eyes and inspire our thoughts. Especially are these things identified with our dearest human relations, with those who are close to our hearts.” But, concerning these, is that which we really know and love only that which is seen? After all, consider how much that is dearest to us, and that we should most hope for, and that pertains to our highest moods of thought, is comprehended in “that which is not seen.”

Unseen! — such is the characteristic of God, the greatest and best of beings, the perfect one. The unseen! — it is the home of the blessed. Struggling men and women, with their storm-beaten hearts, have sailed into its peaceful harbor. Heroes and martyrs have been drawn up to it, their bloody garments transfigured to glory. The weary have sunk joyfully into its rest. While from the earth which he trod with feet of toil and mercy, and from the grave whose gloomy gates he tore asunder, Jesus ascended to it. The unseen! Many whom we have loved, whom we still love, have gone thither. Our

fathers and mothers, dear companions vanishing so strangely away, our children with their little folded hands, and the mysterious shadow on their faces,—all these have passed into the unseen. It is only the body that we see. The kindling thought, the steadfast love, the spiritual element that looks through the eye, and throbs in the warm heart, and holds communion with us day by day,—all these are unseen.

“The things which are seen are temporal.” On the whole, ought we not to be thankful that it is so? For among those things which we see are the forms and conditions of evil, the multiform aspects of sin and suffering and misery. “The things which are seen are temporal;” but, God be praised! “the things which are not seen are eternal.” For, surely, the greatest and best things, the intrinsic joy of goodness, the assurance of truth, the peace of righteousness, are of “the things which are not seen.” Not seen are the enduring principles, the great ideals for which heroes and martyrs, individuals and nations, strive and suffer in dark and trying seasons. The things which we do see are the conflicts and failures and shadows of the hour. But by no sensuous eye are discerned the precious results which are wrought out and bequeathed to future generations. All that pertains to our highest and truest life is involved with “the things which are not seen;” things not seen, yet present; not palpable, but mighty; things not to which we go by and by, but which

are with us now, things not of the letter, but of the spirit, the essence of divine reality, not the mere visible forms.

In fact, each of us has some ideal. As in battle the soldier regards his flag, so in life every man actually regards some signal-point, high or low, worthy or unworthy, which prompts his action. The writer of this epistle proclaims *his* signal-point. Hearer, what is yours? This was the attitude of the Apostle Paul: in all his toils and perils, still "fighting the good fight," he looked to "the things which are not seen."

III.

THE EARNEST TOUCH.

“And Jesus said, Who touched me?”—LUKE viii. 45.

THIS question was occasioned by the conduct of a woman who, suffering under a long and grievous disease, for which she had in vain tried human skill, took advantage of the crowd which had gathered around the Saviour, and touched the fringe of his garment. For this was the strong conviction in the poor woman's mind, “If I may but touch his clothes, I shall be whole.” Her faith was justified, and the affliction of years vanished in a moment. “Who touched me?” said Jesus. “Master,” replied his disciples, “the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?” “Somebody hath touched me,” said Jesus again, “for I perceive that virtue hath gone out of me.” Then the woman, perceiving that she could not be concealed, came tremblingly forward and confessed all. Upon this followed the glad announcement, “Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.”

Perhaps it is hardly necessary for me to dwell upon the question of the woman's motive in this instance. Her desire for concealment may not have been in any respect wrong. Nor does it appear that she wished to obtain the benefit of the miracle by stealth. Probably she adopted this secret method from fear of popular prejudice. Nevertheless, for her spiritual as well as her bodily good, for the good of those who stood by, and also for our own good, it was well that the act should be made public, and receive the open sanction of the Redeemer.

But, in the present discourse, I especially call your attention to our Saviour's question. And I call your attention to it because of the truths which that question implies or suggests, "Who touched me?" Now, we might think that Peter and the other disciples made a very reasonable reply to this, that, with such a crowd thronging and pressing around Jesus, he must, as a matter of course, be touched at every moment, and at all points. But in this woman's touch there was a peculiarity, there was an emphasis, to which the Saviour mercifully responded. It was *not* like the unconsidered pressure of the crowd. In one word, it was a touch with a *purpose*. It was a thrilling touch of *faith* and *need*. And this presents the point which I wish particularly to illustrate.

My hearers, there is much meaning in a *touch*. In passing along these crowded streets how readily

do we distinguish the touch of friendly recognition, the touch that claims special attention, from the general pressure of the multitude! How different is even a child's touch of supplication or affection from the collision of hurrying and unheeding forms? Take the stranger alone in the great city, the loneliest of all places to such as he; take the poor, friendless wanderer, drifting along without regard or sympathy,—and with what deep, pathetic truth might he say, as the ceaseless crowd sweeps by, “Nobody has touched me.”

But I come to a more special point, and it really suggests all that I have to say at this time. I come to the point involved in this simple question: of all the multitudes that throng and press around Jesus, who of us *touches* him? For I assume the fact, that, in the essence and power of his personality, Jesus is with us still. He stands before us in the records of the New Testament. He is with us in the ordinances of the sanctuary. He is proclaimed every sabbath day. He is with us in institutions that enshrine his spirit, and try to do a portion of his work. For ages Jesus has been travelling on, performing his miracles of civilization and of love. And while he has infused such new life into a paralytic humanity, and cast out demons of violence, and lifted up bruised heads, and comforted sore hearts, alas, how many of the aspects that met his gaze of old linger among us still!—the same pale

faces of woe, the same red eyes of weeping, the lame and the blind, the dumb and the insane, Jairuses beseeching for their children's lives, and widows following their dead sons to the grave. But as the Redeemer's presence is no more a bodily presence, so his works of deliverance are no more external works. Nevertheless, he is with us now to do the same great work as of old, the work of which the external miracles were only symbols, the work which, deeper than the physical cure, we trust was wrought in the soul of the poor woman who touched him, a work of spiritual help and healing.

And crowds throng and press around Jesus to-day, as crowds have pressed and thronged around him in all times since he came. For the religion of Jesus is not—in some sense we can hardly say that it ever has been—an *unpopular* religion. Even in the time of Christ's personal advent, even concerning the nation that rejected him and crucified him, it is said that "the common people heard him gladly." And everywhere, in cities and villages, in desert places, on the mountain-side and by the sea, eager and reverential multitudes gathered about him. There is more than one sense to this term "popular." It may indicate, as we well know, a very fickle and a very superficial condition. It is by no means a sign of strength or depth or truthfulness, when a man or an idea is "popular." And yet there is a sense in which popularity rests on permanence, and testifies

to intrinsic excellence and power. That which elevates the minds, and fills the hearts, and meets the moral wants of the people, is in the best sense popular, and has in itself a witness to its truth. And in this way the religion of Jesus has been "popular." Because of its *universality*, because of its *adaptedness*, it has been a religion of the people, a religion of the multitude. Because of this it has survived all persecutions, all assaults, and even the inconsistencies of its own professed disciples; and it will survive all these. And so with us to-day, I trust not merely nominally, but at least with some perception of its truth and power, Christianity is the *popular* religion.

Nevertheless, in this last remark the ambiguity of this term "popular" recurs. Christianity, I repeat, is popular in the sense of being applicable to the needs of the human heart, and to the aspirations of the human soul. In its substance fitted to the people, it has deep and imperishable roots in the conditions of our spiritual being. But is it not also the popular religion in this other and less genuine sense to which I have referred, in the sense of mere superficial acceptance? While, as I have just said, I trust that some perception of its real truth and power widely prevails, still, is it not too much the case that Christianity is only nominally received, that it is a traditional rather than a personal religion, that it is maintained as a form rather than a conviction? Is

it not largely accepted by a spirit that is much more ready to talk gospel than to practise it; a spirit that might be quite willing to put the name of its divine Author and Founder into the Constitution of the United States, and yet remain as before uninfluenced by his life and regardless of his claims, and, therefore, only add one more illustration of saying, "Lord! Lord!" without doing the will of the Lord?

No, we do not lack *symbolical* expressions of Christian belief. Our churches, for instance, are well filled. It is a cheering sight, on a pleasant Sunday, while the pulse of traffic ceases to throb along these stony arteries, and the busy marts are closed, to see the streams of human life flowing to and from our places of Christian worship. I say, of a *pleasant* Sunday, because it must be confessed that the popular faith is somewhat atmospherical in its relations. It falls with the barometer, and collapses under a cloud, while, apparently, health is more precarious and raindrops are more malignant on Sunday than on any other day. Nevertheless, this spectacle of church-attendance is cheering, because I believe that it is impelled by at least some half-conscious force of conviction. I find no evidence in this country, or in any other, that the interest in church-services is dying out, at least where the great realities of religion are earnestly and effectively presented. And much that seems to indicate the contrary condemns the unfaithfulness of profession, and not the religion of

the Master. Around us there is the form of Christian reverence, there breathes the air of Christian sentiment, showing that there is a depth of religious conviction somewhere. Once more, then, I say that Christianity is a religion of the multitude, and crowds; as of old, gather around the Saviour. But, among all these, who *touches* him?

In other words, how many feel the reality of a *personal relation* to Jesus? How many consciously recognize that their lives are implicated with his life? With how many is all this conformity any thing more than mere historical, traditional Sunday observance? How many own the burden of a moral disease that is more radical than palsy, or fever, or leprosy of the flesh? Alas! no more in proportion, perhaps, than among the multitudes who thronged around Jesus nineteen hundred years ago.

I do not presume to judge the motives of those who appear in our churches; but I may be permitted to suggest that many come merely from curiosity, to see, to hear, to admire, to criticise; or they come from habit, or as a form of conventional routine. But they come with no consciousness of soul-need, with no heart-hunger; and they go as they come. No, not *all*. Among this multitude, perhaps, some sorrowing man or woman, some poor outcast it may be, all secretly and silently has crept to Him, touched, as it were, the hem of his garment, and gone away with his blessing in the soul. Jesus is with us still. Con-

sciously or unconsciously, each of us, as each in that crowd of old, bears some relation to him. But I ask again, who of us, like that woman, approaches him with an intense purpose? I do not accuse these multitudes of open disbelief or of mocking unbelief. I have already suggested that they are moved by some half-conscious force of latent faith. Nay, there are many who may say, "We are *not* indifferent concerning Jesus. We *do* touch him." If so, then the question occurs, *How* do you touch him?

I. Of some, of many, it may be said that they touch Jesus with their *respect*. No doubt the religion of Christ *is* respected. Christianity is at least a respectable institution. Old, ploughed-out, sun-baked worldlings, with not a particle of live faith in their souls, not so much as a grain of mustard-seed, respect the purity and tenderness of the great Teacher of Nazareth. If nothing more, they confess that this respect is such a prevalent prejudice among the people at large, that it will not do to offend it, and it must at least be simulated. Again, the man who by some analytical process in the crucible of criticism has resolved the gospel into an unsubstantial ether, the gaseous wisp or nebulous outline of a history, respects the personality whose features so enduringly abide upon the pages of the New Testament. I will not stop now to inquire what must have been the original of that portrait, so attractive, so abiding, so mighty in its influence upon the minds and hearts

of men. I merely say that it exerts this influence, and commands the respect even of those who deny that it represents any substantial reality.

Yes, it is wonderful how the character of Jesus has impressed, and does impress, even sceptical and thoughtless minds. There are those who do not hesitate to employ the name of God in the lightest and most reckless forms of speech, who will not swear by the name of the Redeemer; and this form of oath is abandoned to the coarsest and most vulgar men. Nevertheless, all this respect is not like that *touch* which was given in the earnest purpose of faith and need.

II. There are those who touch Jesus with their *opinions*. And they are very sharp and decided opinions. So sharp that they cut away all lines of toleration, so decided that they leave no possible margin of charity. Now, in matters of religion, as in all other things, there can be no objection to distinctness of view. And yet is it not true that there are some minds whose vision is clear and definite, exactly in proportion to the narrowness of their horizon? It is better, perhaps, to be sure of every thing than to be sure of nothing; but there are regions of divine reality, where we may fitly halt, and be humble, and confess that we do not know. Moreover, there are points where it may not be necessary that we should decidedly and clearly *know*, where the practical efficacy of a truth for the soul does not de-

pend upon absolute accuracy of definition in the intellect. Creeds may be useful as confessions of present belief, or as mere statements of opinion in which a number of people concur. But they have no validity as fixed and final standards of truth, certainly not as tests of religious and Christian life. Of course some shape of opinion is essential to practical conduct, and we cannot trust in that concerning which we have no intellectual perception. Still, there may be enough of mental apprehension to warrant our trust, though not enough to analyze all the grounds of that trust, much less to set up definite propositions as imperative for the faith of others. It is not likely that the opinions which the woman in the narrative before us held concerning Jesus could be formulated or defined. They would hardly accord with any doctrinal standard, or answer the requisitions of our creeds. But she apprehended enough to trust him, to draw near to him, and to touch him. She felt her need of healing power, and was sure that he could heal her. We may value our opinions, we must value them if they seem to us identical with truth, especially if they make that truth vital in our souls. But, held as mere opinions, their intellectual validity gives us no real contact with the Saviour. We may actually be what we claim to be, exclusive possessors and vigilant guardians of orthodoxy, and yet be far from him. The essential thing is not what we think about him, but what he himself, in his per-

sonal relations, in his healing, life-giving power, is to us.

III. Again, there are those who seek to touch Jesus through *sacraments* and *ceremonies*. The idea of the woman appears to have been of this kind. She thought, "If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole;" whereas we know that the virtue went out of him. But, at the core, her faith was right and effectual. So, in the use of the symbol or ceremony, there may be the consecrating efficacy of an earnest purpose. Thousands are thus blest, who perhaps could be spiritually helped and healed in no other way. The heart of faith sanctifies the rudest form; and even the poor African, who grovels before his fetish, through all that darkness may touch some fringe of the divine Presence, and be nearer to him whose fulness is in all things, than the philosopher who gazes into the infinite, and coldly sneers. Such as these, with their clear perceptions and "liberal ideas," do not touch him, while he graciously accepts, through whatever channels, the precipitation of the yearning and filial soul. But when the ceremony is assumed as the end, when the symbol is taken for the thing signified, and the sacrament made exclusive and absolute, in one word, when devotion is regarded as talismanic, then it is time to assert that the essence of religion is not in wafer or crucifix, in form or substance, but in the contact of spirit with spirit, and that the virtue is in *Him* alone.

IV. There are those who touch Jesus *timidly* and *fitfully*. Their communion with him is felt only in impulses of intermittent enthusiasm or seasons of excitement, or it is held as a secret of which they are ashamed. We must, indeed, respect the modesty of sincere faith, the sacred reticence that guards the deepest and truest feelings of the heart. We know that religious emotion may evaporate in words, and that sterling principle may be less demonstrative than the noisy ring of cant. But, notwithstanding all imperfections, he who has really touched Jesus will in some way make the secret manifest, not in the mere profession of the lips, but in the confession of the life.

In fine, the true touching of Jesus is in the spirit with which the poor woman touched him, with a sense of need and earnest desire for his help. And we can thus come only as we are awakened to a consciousness of our individuality. We are prone to move with the mass of men, to think, believe, and worship with the mass. We must break through the crowd of and for ourselves, by the impulse of our own conviction, awakened to the fact, that, beyond the mere means of living, there is for each of us the great interest, the unfathomed reality, of life itself. And we can truly live only as we get near, as we hold communion with, that divine life. We need this not only to die by, but to live by,—to harmonize our nature, to consecrate our powers, to curb our

self-will. The young and the happy need it, as the condition of all strong and free and noble being, of all true manhood and womanhood. Let us at once and forever put away the conceit that associates religion only with life's gloomiest hours and with its last, that regards it only as a retreat from the world when the world has nothing for us but sorrow and trial, a refuge, into which we may at last crawl with our paralytic souls, and bring the shattered and desecrated glass of our mortality to sweeten its lees. And yet, God be thanked, it *is* a refuge, full of help and cure when all else is desolate. Standing here amidst the environment of material things, Christ interprets life.

In this vast mechanism of forms and forces, what exceptional significance has man? The processes of nature are impartial and relentless. Within the limits of visible things, the words of the Psalmist are mournfully exact: the days of man "are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more." And what hints of *another* life can we extort from the unknown regions of the universe? We may argue that these anxious inquiries are futile, and should, therefore, be repressed. But this gospel of ignorance can never be a gospel of peace, for these aspirations cannot be repressed. The life within us yearns to be forever. The thought of annihilation, if not absolutely incon-

ceivable, is inexpressibly desolate. There is only one other conception that is more dreadful, the idea of endless suffering. With only this alternative before us, we might indeed say, "Better that all there is of us should crumble to unconscious dust, or, happily, 'turn to daisies from the grave,' than that we should linger in eternal pain." Thus, baffled by the limitations of the material world, we turn with the eagerness of the woman of old to One who has rent the veil, and who comes to us from beyond. Touching him, we lay hold of divine realities, and receive in our own souls the assurance of an eternal life.

But there are thousands for whom such questions need not be answered nor repressed; for, in their minds, such questions have never sharply emerged at all. They are immersed in the crowd of common cares. They are of the weak, the sorrowing, and the sinful. Their need is urgent, and of the very hour. They want that faith, that peace, that reconciliation, which shall stanch the tormenting issue of their souls. Indeed, who of us is not weak, or needy, or sorrowful, or sinful? Who of us does not continually want that inspiring contact with something far higher and better than we,—with a divine strength and virtue,—to lift us up and carry us through? But in whatever way the depths of our nature are stirred and broken up, in whatever way we truly feel that need, we shall earnestly seek

that help. And the divine Helper and Healer is everywhere. We may come to him through the crowd of our toils and our cares, in our homes, in the places of our labor, and by the wayside. But especially may we draw near to him in the opportunities of the sanctuary. However feebly his word may there be spoken, however imperfectly his help shown forth, through all, if only we are in earnest, we may find him, touch some fringe of his garment, and feel the healing of his Spirit. There are those here, I trust, who have thus found him, and have gone on their way rejoicing. Otherwise, our association with him is only the contact of the crowd. Otherwise, our coming together here is of little worth. And might he not say, speaking as it were to us, "Many have come and gone here, with or without an earnest purpose, from habit or from curiosity, to pray or to speculate, to meditate or to sleep. You have come and gone. You have heeded, or remained heedless. You have thought, or wandered in thought. You have grown better, or you have grown worse. But—who *touched* me?"

IV.

RUTH.

“And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.” — RUTH i. 16, 17.

THE Book of Ruth, with the ancient Jews and some of the Fathers, formed a part of the book of Judges; but, in our English Bible, this little domestic story, occupying only a leaf or two, stands apart from the common track of the history, and we come upon it as one might come upon some quiet rural landscape, after travelling through scenes of excitement and war. And among all the personages depicted in this portion of the Scriptures,—among the forms of prophet, warrior, bard, and king,—perhaps there is none so attractive, there is none that wins us with such gentle beauty, as the picture of that Moabitish woman, following the dictates of her own true heart, and gleaning after the reapers in the barley-harvest.

For, in tracing the outlines of the story, I only

recall that which must be familiar to you. During a season of famine, a man of Bethlehem named Elimelech, with his wife Naomi and his two sons, emigrated to the land of Moab. These sons married two women of their adopted country, named Orpah and Ruth. But in a little while, as the record so briefly and touchingly recites, Naomi "was left of her two sons and her husband." Alone, in a foreign land, learning that her people had once more been blessed with bread, she prepared to return to her own country. Alas, how familiar the affliction which that widowed and childless woman bore away in her own heart! How fresh her experience of thousands of years ago, appealing to us to-day through the channels of our common nature! It is but a story of the next street, or perhaps of the very house in which you dwell. No unusual thing has it been, since Naomi's time, for those who went forth in peace to come back to the old spot desolate, scattering in the furrows of their early hope the fruition of their tears. I think there is something peculiarly expressive in the question which was asked of the returning woman as she came into her native place. We are told that "the whole city was moved, and they said, Is this Naomi?" as though there had been excited not only the feeling of surprise but of doubt, as though in the face of that Naomi whom they had known in former years, her friends saw the shadow of something that was not Naomi,—the

added expression of time and sorrow. "Call me not Naomi," she replied, "call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty."

It was when Naomi had started upon this sad journey homeward, that the incident occurred which is associated with the text. She felt that she had no special claim upon the companionship of her daughters-in-law. She knew their attachment to herself, and she invoked the blessing of the Lord upon them for their kindness to the dead; but she had not the heart to carry them away from their home and their friends, to share her desolation, and her comparative strangeness even in her own land. The affection of Orpah was, apparently, such as we often find, — easily moved and easily turned. She wept, she kissed her mother-in-law, and then went back to her people and her gods. But the love of Ruth was of that kind which never ebbs. The dearest associations of her life were bound up with the returning Naomi. She inherited the sanctity of past vows. She was the representative of the dead. Ruth could not tear asunder this last living tie of memory and of love. "Entreat me not to leave thee," she cried, "or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will

I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”

The sequel of the story is in cheerful contrast with its pathetic beginning. Gleaning in the field of Boaz, a wealthy kinsman of her first husband, Ruth found favor in his sight ; enlisted his interest in behalf of her claims, and, in becoming his wife, became the mother of an illustrious descent, an ancestress in the line of David, and the genealogy of the Saviour.

Of course this last-named fact furnishes a reason why the story of Ruth should find a place in the Bible, and stand among the events of sacred history. Yet, surely, if it had not this historical interest, it would deserve the place which it holds, because of its beautiful accordance with the character of the Scriptures, as containing, more than all other books, a universal and imperishable literature, a literature so fresh to the heart of all ages, so easily translated into the sentiments of every nation. For I need not say that it is this that constitutes a great literature. It is this that gives immortality to Homer and Shakespeare. And, even if the Bible had no special divineness, this element streaming through all its pages would place it first in that row of the world's really great books, the whole of which might be ranged upon one narrow shelf.

Well, out of this brief story of Ruth and Naomi, as out of every thing else in the Bible, there grow

some practical lessons. I might, for instance, take up that great lesson, always pertinent, — the lesson of Providence. For that which not only the religious but the thoughtful mind learns to call by this name wrought wonderfully and beautifully through the experience of that Moabitish woman, out of trouble and bereavement drawing the most happy results, preparing a splendid reward for her faithfulness, and turning the stream of her personal life into the grand current of the world's redemption. And are we not as much impressed by this Providential action when it manifests itself through some chain of natural incidents like these before us, when it winds through some episode of the Bible, as when it assumes a more magnificent aspect, and breaks forth in miracle? For such incidents, while they really authenticate the miracle, and make reasonable the belief that He who exercises this general control would, for worthy issues, make special manifestations, come nearer to us, and suggest the Divine control that comprehends all our transactions. She who clung to the desolate Naomi, and gleaned after the reapers, walks through the gallery of Scripture in gentle beauty forever, and stands gloriously in the family of the Prince of peace.

But I wish to call your attention to a more special train of thought. There is nothing in this beautiful narrative that touches us more tenderly than this earnest appeal: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to

return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried." In this passage I find suggestion for some remarks upon *True-heartedness* and the *Tests* of True-heartedness. And I observe, in the first place, that the conduct of Ruth, in the instance before us, assures us that there *is* such a thing as True-heartedness, and thus teaches a lesson of trust in humanity. It reveals certain elements in humanity that are reliable. This trait in the character of Ruth refutes that scepticism which is cherished by some, and which breaks out in sneers at the moral soundness of every man and every woman. This is a detestable philosophy. It is detestable, I mean, when it becomes a philosophy. There is a kind of disappointment to which anybody is liable,—a disappointment that involves the giving up of a too credulous trust in men, the recoil of the heart's spontaneous confidence under the revelations of actual life. While we had heard something respecting the deceitfulness of the world, the selfishness of its friendships, and the hollowness of its professions, we may have thought that to *us* it would not prove so; and it *has* proved to us even as to others. We have found in it a great deal of meanness, and a great deal of fraud, and much cold-heartedness under fair protestations. We have trusted and been deceived. "The word of

promise to the ear has been broken to the hope." We have discovered that the sunshine in our friend's face was reflected from the surface of our own prosperity, and that the companion of happy hours is shy of our tribulation. We have seen how conscience slips out of trade, and philanthropy goes with a trumpet, and the sylph is only a woman, and the clergyman is but a man, and the patriot a politician, and the philosopher a dunce. Out of all this grows the temptation to discredit every profession, and to look upon the whole world as a masquerade. There are times and occasions, in individual and in public experience, when this feeling is intensified. But, surely, a wise man will soon escape from this mood. On the other hand, if that, which with many is only a temporary distrust, becomes with anybody a fixed theory, it seems to me that it proves, on his part, either a shallow experience or a bad heart, and perhaps both. For no man with a right spirit ever thought all the rest totally bad, and no man with a comprehensive knowledge of the world ever found them so. This social scepticism may be called "knowledge of the world;" but this only shows what a superficial affair this so-called knowledge of the world is. The hackneyed man of the town boasts that he has seen life all through, when in fact he has only seen a little of its surface palpable to the sensuous eye. Very likely, too, he has found there only what he brought there, — he has seen such forms as

he evoked. He is no philosopher taking in the wide range of humanity, as it lies stretched out under the changeful lights of life, and heaving with mysterious forces: he knows only its heated zone of appetite and passion. He is no social geologist, who has pierced the innermost strata of mankind, but only a hollow speculator rattling among the pebbles on the surface. Much heartlessness, much frivolity and sin, will a wise and good man find as he goes about in the world, much to dissipate the rosy credulousness of his youth, and to sadden his philanthropy; but, on the other hand, something of his faith will be justified, and he will learn, that, after all, there are elements in human nature worthy our trust and our love. For such a theory of humanity the lesson in the text affords a strong support. The trait that attracts us there is Ruth's True-heartedness, the overmastering energy of affection and of duty. And, while this trait stands out in such beautiful relief in this narrative of the Old Testament, surely we cannot believe that this is the *only* instance of True-heartedness, or even that it belongs to an exceptional class. No, rather does it stand there representing numerous unrecorded instances. It is the cropping out, in Scripture history, of a vein of True-heartedness that runs underneath all the selfishness and pretension of common life. As the chemist finds some admixture in what seemed to be a simple element, so, doubtless, at the bottom of the purest heart lurks

some particle of self, some ingredient of our earthly composition. And if one is disposed to turn a magnifying glass upon this, it will appear enormous; if he beholds it through the lens of a sad or a foul experience, it will look grimy or distorted; or, if with nothing more than his naked eye he has a mind to notice only the evil that exists among men, he can see plenty of it, and it will look badly enough. But it is an equally correct theory of human nature, and a much more agreeable one, which admits the conviction of some moral loyalty, extant even in the obscurest places, and maintained under all trials. It is pleasant to think, that, as in the great field of history the very spots that glorify it are spots of blood and tears shed in token of this True-heartedness, spots where the philanthropist toiled, and the martyr witnessed for the truth, or where the patriot with his dying hands shook aloft the symbols of freedom, so these common paths of life are lighted by some such virtue and sacrifice, and there is some true and good thing clung to by the feeblest hands, some sanctuary of duty which even the basest cannot be tempted to abandon or violate, at least *one* sentinel virtue at the door of every heart that challenges all seductions and repels all assaults. It is inspiring to think that in high places and in low places, in silent faithfulness that never will be recorded, there often breathes a spirit like hers, who, loyal to the convictions of her own true heart, left her land, and her

idols, and the associations of her youth, to share the lot of the weeping Naomi, and in the sacred venture of love and duty to find a Home and a Country, a God and a Grave.

I repeat, then, he who adopts a sceptical theory of humanity apparently confesses, either his limited knowledge or his own corruption. He forgets the records of the dead, and he slanders the living; while, as its worst result, such a theory paralyzes all generous effort for mankind, and leads to heartless indifference or cynical isolation. Nothing good or great can spring out of this conception of humanity, while its interpretation of things is essentially atheistic.

But, having thus vindicated human nature as to the *fact* of True-heartedness, let us proceed to consider its *tests*. By what signs or expressions may we be assured of its presence? I reply that the very words of the text, the very ideas to which Ruth referred, afford a sufficient indication of these tests: "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried." These words disclose a fourfold test of True-heartedness. Loyalty to any one of these — much more, loyalty to all of these — reveals the core of a noble and generous humanity. For consider what these ideas, expressed in the language of Ruth, really are. They are the ideas of

Home, Country, God, and the end of our Mortal life. And are there any ideas more vital than these? Surely, if one cherishes any sacred and true thoughts at all, they must cluster around these things. *Home*, that has sheltered and nourished you, that encloses your most secret life, that claims the first flow of your affections and their last throb; *Country*, that organism which links your individual being to a public interest, that gives you a share in history, a pride in great names, an influence in world-wide issues, and, as a second home, inspires you with a more comprehensive loyalty; the *Grave*, which bounds all earthly action, and limits every earthly condition, that realm where distinctions of home and country melt away, the bed where all must lie, "the relentless crucible" in which rags and splendor alike dissolve, the gateway to a stupendous mystery; and *God*, the Infinite Being to whom the instincts of our souls respond, to whom in our highest consciousness we aspire, the Source and the Interpretation of all existence, the Light that comprehends our darkness, the Strength that sustains our weakness, the Presence to which in our guilt and our adoration we lift our cry, the Nature in which we live and move and have our being, — these are great realities; and it appears to me that the words of Ruth are so eloquent, and her devotion seems so great, because of the greatness of the things she spoke of.

Indeed, does not this ground of thought and action

constitute a grand distinction of our humanity? If in many points man is closely linked to the brute, is he not largely separated by his thoughts concerning these things, and by his action upon them? Ascribe to the animal such affections, such faculties, such power of reasoning, as we may and as we must, surely no one will claim for him such conceptions as man entertains concerning home and country and God and the limitations of his earthly lot. These are manifestations of human nature which project beyond the sphere of mere animal life, and indicate a larger scope of being. They are marks of immortality. Start with any one of these ideas, and see to what it leads. For instance, the relationships of home,—is there not an argument for immortality in these? Need I put this question to any heart that has ever known its best conditions, or been stirred by its affections? Need I ask any, who with overflowing love have ever stood by the cradle or the death-bed? It is this home affection that is first of all thwarted by the mysteries of our lot, and that claims perpetual reunion. I will not elaborate this argument, but merely refer to the fact that all round this earth, from the vacant places and shattered links of countless families, there are hearts that gravitate to the unseen, and there are faces that with tearful trust look upward for those who have gone from home.

Or start from the idea of *country*, and is not the same conclusion unfolded? The duties, the achieve-

ments, the historical problems, that pertain to nationality, do not they suggest it? And he upon whose mind dawns some apprehension of the Infinite, he who has some consciousness of the divine image in himself, he who feels assured that he holds communion with the Eternal Spirit, and presses forward towards that perfect excellence, never completely to attain, but always capable of larger attainment, — surely in essence he must be imperishable. And the grave itself, dark and silent as it is, to such a conscious soul cannot seem the final barrier of existence, but only the suggestive portal of new achievements.

If, then, these great realities, of which Ruth spoke, are associated with all that is deepest and noblest in our humanity, he who proves faithful to even one of these ideas, who holds it as a sacred conviction, and cherishes it with a pure love, has in him the core of true-heartedness, the ground of a principle, and a possibility in which we may trust. On the other hand, in depicting the most depraved man, could we say any thing more to the purpose than that he violates the sanctities of home, is false to his country, disbelieves in God, and has no faith or hope that reaches beyond the circle of his animal life? Is not all that discrowns and demoralizes a man involved or implied in the denial and violation of these?

And permit me to add that these tests are personal and practical, tests by which we may try not

so much the true-heartedness of others, for which we may have very little function, but by which each may try his own. A man can hardly ask himself a more practical question than this: "What are my thoughts, and what is my conduct, respecting home, country, God, and the limitations of my mortal life?" Whatever your position or estimation in the world, if without any over-subtle analysis, or morbid probing of conscience, you would ascertain your spiritual health or unsoundness, here is a practical test close at hand. Ask yourself, then, "What is *home* to me? What do I make of it?" For a home of some sort you have, and it is the starting-point of your entire action. Emerging from it, you take with you influences fruitful for good or for evil into the world. What, then, is home to you? What do you make it to be? What do you carry into it, and how do you start from it into the broader field of life and action?

And you have a country. It is a sacred organism, like the organism of personal life. It binds you to the past and the future. It pours the unexhausted vitality of the dead into the arteries of the living, and pledges your individual life to the life of coming generations. In your own case, then, is love of country merely a verbal platitude? Is it, after all, only love of comfort, love of gain, love of party, or perhaps nothing more sacred than mere hate of party, in whose concentrated malignity the nobler claim

shrivels like leaves under the frost? Or are you inclined to satirize love of country as "mere sentiment," and the patriotic fire that leaps through a nation's life as "preposterous"? "Sentiment"? Yes, it *is* sentiment; that is the proper word for this mysterious impulse, which condenses in its flow all the memories and hopes and sanctities of a land. It *is* sentiment: so is a mother's love; so is reverence for the dead; so are the elements of faith and devotion, — something which we cannot define, but which is spontaneous and irresistible; something that plays upon the grandest pulses of the human heart, and thrills through generations; something which keeps sparks alive in dead men's ashes, and with rattling drums and loud huzzas impels ranks of heroes to glorious death, when the mist of battle hangs heavy on the hills, and the morning dewdrops are turned to rubies; a sentiment that charms men so that they willingly die for it, and that tightens their heartstrings and makes their cheeks grow hot, where the symbol of nationality is unfurled. This love of country lives in the heart of every true-hearted man. When, by any strange infatuation, men lose this sentiment, they lose the core of their hearts.

Again, let me ask, what are your thoughts concerning God? Let *that* deep question be put to your own soul. And what are your relations to him? Is he to you any thing more than an intellectual term,

or an article of faith? Is he a reality? "My soul," says the Psalmist, "crieth out for the living God." Is he to you the *living* God, and does your own soul cry out to him as such; or is he merely one of many gods? Your Sunday God, perhaps, not your market, counting-room, week-day God, nor the God to whom you are *devoted*; so that, clinging to your idols, you could not truly say to any man who sincerely loves and serves him, "Thy God shall be my God."

And the end of your mortal career, the thoughts that fitly cluster about the grave, — have they ever lodged in your mind to any serious purpose? "And there will I be buried." In these words of Ruth there were true womanly calmness and noble forethought; and not with morbid intensity, not as overclouding the present work of duty and these earthly claims, but with true calmness and noble forethought, should these considerations of our mortality hold their place in our minds.

I maintain, that, as we act in respect to these four great ideas of home, country, God, and the final rest, so shall we faithfully or falsely act concerning the ends of our being. As these ideas become real to our hearts, and in true hearts are cherished, so shall we live worthily.

I remark, finally, that these four ideas are not only the tests of personal true-heartedness, — they also reveal the great bond of our common humanity.

That which is common to men abides in the *hearts* of men, is linked with the great facts expressed in the text. They thus indicate the natural ground of human unity. And upon these ideas it is the tendency of Christianity to develop a still nobler unity. While it carries abroad its truth of a universal Father, and its fact of the resurrection of the dead, its tendency is to expand the home feeling into a social feeling, and to touch the deepest chords of nationality with a world-wide sentiment stretching from land to land, even as the electric wire, crossing the globe, catches the interests of every people as it passes, and murmurs a glorious prophecy beneath the waves.

Christianity may have larger work to do than we can now conceive; it may gather in for its divine Author more transcendent glories: but, so far as this world is concerned, its purpose would seem to be accomplished when the declaration of Ruth becomes a realized result in humanity at large; when the children of men, owning the bonds of one common Head, from the sacred sentiment of *home* shall draw fresh streams of *social* life; when in the *country* which each loves best each shall discern some interest common to all the world; when all shall worship one God, the Father, in spirit and in truth; and when the light of one transcendent hope shall shine upon the places of their mortal rest.

V.

CHRIST WALKING ON THE SEA.

“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.” — MATT. xiv. 25, 26.

THE incident to which I call your attention in the present discourse is that of Christ walking on the sea. I propose to consider the spiritual or religious significance of this incident, or, rather, of the entire narrative with which it is involved. In the first place, then, I will briefly recall the circumstances. Jesus had been busy with his work of teaching and of mercy; so busy that there was little opportunity for that rest, which, if he did not seek for himself, he recommended to his disciples. But at length, having distributed the bread of life to the souls of the multitude, and literal bread for their needy bodies, having sent the people away, and constrained his disciples to go before in a ship across the Galilean Lake to Bethsaida, he sought that refreshment, which, more than any thing else, was to him rest and help and strength, and so departed into a moun-

tain to pray. But when evening had come he looked out upon the deep, and saw his disciples "toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them." So, in the fourth watch of the night, — between three and six o'clock in the morning, — through the gloom and the tempest, in that *mysterious* and solemn hour, Jesus came to those beset and weary men, walking on the sea. "And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear." But immediately Jesus talked with them, and said to them, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid;" and going up unto them into the ship the wind ceased.

Keeping in view, then, the spiritual significance of this incident, I remark that it affords an illustration of *human need* and *divine help*. Or, to state the truth in another form, I may say that the passage connected with the text illustrates the proposition that the religion of Jesus is adapted to human necessities, and in this adaptation finds proof of its authenticity. I repeat, here are presented two points.

I. Human need.

II. Divine help.

Furthermore, I observe that these two facts are involved with two aspects or conditions of humanity.

I. In the first place, I ask you to consider the attitude of man towards the *supernatural* and the *unknown*. "In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the

disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear." This was the cry of men tossed and toiling on the wild deep, in the gloom of the yet unbroken night, or in that hour when the dawn is struggling with the dark. Very startling, very awful, must have been to them the appearance of that form, advancing through the shadow and over the sea. But that was a cry of our common nature; it was a spontaneous, human utterance from a mysterious depth, which, under all forms of civilization, under all kinds of religion and philosophy, abides in the soul of man. The conviction of something beyond this world, something outside this realm of visible and familiar things, is, at least, a conviction to which man very readily awakens. It may not be a very practical conviction: thousands may live without any intense or steady appreciation of that to which such a conviction points. But there are occasions when this mysterious deep within us answers to the great deep around us. Sometimes this conviction comes suddenly, like that instance of the traveller in the mountains, whose alpen-stock broke through the icy crust projecting from the path on which he was walking, and in an instant, through the cleft, there were revealed the awful abysses that yawned below. But there are three conditions of nature which are especially adapted to stir these feelings of mystery and awe, and all three are involved with the circum-

stances of the text: these conditions are night, the night sky, and the sea.

1. Witness the common terror of the dead nighttime and the dark; not a mere childish, superstitious fright, but a solemn awe creeping over the innermost fibres of the heart. "In thought from the visions of the night," said Eliphaz, "when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: it stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof." Men who are not cowards, who have courage to grapple with any visible and tangible shape, who would not blench before "the battery's jaws of flame," may often have felt the shivering awe, if they have not had the actual experience, of Eliphaz. And this is not a credulity begotten of what some may see fit to call "religious notions," and "old wives' fables." Men who have cast off all forms of Christian belief, as mere swaddling-bands of the ignorant mind, have, nevertheless, been moved by the mystery enveloped in the hours of darkness, and have acted upon the conviction that *something* must people that undefined space into which the visible world melts away, that dim horizon through which Jesus broke, when, in the fourth watch of the night, he came walking on the sea.

2. Or, again, who has ever looked up through the darkness, and gazed upon those orbs of light

and glory that shame all splendors of the earth and the daytime, without the spontaneous conviction of powers and intelligences dwelling outside these beaten ways of our traffic and our thought? Although the astronomer may fail to detect any positive proof of the inhabitability of other worlds, we cannot believe that the attributes of life and mind are confined to the little planet on which we dwell.

“Look up through night, the world is wide:
Think'st thou this mould of hopes and fears
Can find no statelier than its peers,
In yonder hundred million spheres?”

Even if we could assent to those speculations which would resolve all those orbs that burn in space into desolate masses of fluid light, none the less would there rise within us deep yearnings of the soul to penetrate the secret of the universe, to know what is the constitution of the system that converges upon our world, to discover what power and purpose has kindled that boundless realm with all this magnificence, and that must have some relations with our earthly dwelling-place, and some control over this transient, yet real and mysterious, life. What influences rain upon us from those starry depths? What unseen messengers glide down those awful solitudes? And who or what is it that comprehends all these, that presses upon us its decrees, and works its ends,

and with these bears up our globe of human destinies, and steers it through this silent sea of space?

3. Or, once more, consider that element in which the greatness and the mystery of nature and of life are represented. What suggestions of the supernatural and the unknown rise upon us from the bosom of the sea! What intimations of depths beyond our sight and sense in its strange sounds, or still more awful silence, in its boundlessness and its beauty! How much nearer are we brought to regions beyond our terrestrial scope, when the familiar land fades from our sight, and around us there is nothing but those unfathomed depths, and heaven above! What revelations of pomp, of magnificence, towards which human achievements are only an abortive aspiration, when this cup of immeasurable waters circles us all around, its edge lit with the proclamation of the coming sun, or embossed with the setting planets of the night! What a conviction of our impotence, our enclosure in the grasp of relentless powers,—be they fatal or beneficent,—when the wide gray sweep of waters crackles with the tempest, or heaves in foam and thunder! Who wonders that the sailor is often a superstitious, but seldom a really irreligious man? Might we not expect, that not in the populous places of the earth, not even in the wilderness that yet stirs with countless form of familiar life, but out upon the pathless, solitary deep, might walk some messenger from the unknown world, even as Christ,

in the fourth watch of the night, came walking upon the sea?

But, whatever the occasion, nobody can deny that there *are* occasions when there is awakened in man a conviction of powers and realities beyond sense, and above nature, at least in the ordinary meaning of that term, and nobody can deny that all over the world, and in all ages, this conviction has manifested itself. The attempt to repress these motions of the human soul is as vain as the attempt to repress hunger or thirst or thought, or any spontaneous operation of man's body or his mind. Hence, whatever may be the assumptions of our day as to religious doctrines and forms of faith, such assumptions are to be met by the affirmation that man has had and always will have some kind of religious doctrine, some form of faith. This is not an artificial condition of the human race, but a natural tendency, aspiring to reach beyond the veil, and know something of the power that created and controls it. The attitude of man towards the supernatural and the unknown is the attitude of human *need*, requiring some explanation as to what this life of ours is, and as to who or what it is that guides and determines all.

Regarding thus this attitude of human need, in the next place there arises the question, What *help* has been found for it? And I may say that two answers have come; one proceeding from the side of human sentiment, and the other from human reason.

1. One answer elicited in this attitude of human need appears in various forms of superstition. It is not necessary for me to dwell upon the strange, the absurd, the hideous shapes which have been projected by the human soul reaching out into infinity, and aspiring to hold communion with the unseen. Let me remark, however, that even the grossest of these superstitions does not present an aspect utterly pitiable and absurd. Rock-temples and bloody altars, human sacrifices and fetich worship, proclaim the fact that our nature does not all gravitate to the slime of sense, and the darkness of annihilation. Many instances of wretched credulity the philosopher may accumulate; but none of these are so marvellous as the credulity which accepts the notion that all such phenomena are the offspring of foolish traditions and priestly cunning, that they are mere mists or phantoms of the human brain, artfully generated, lighted, and shadowed by the magic lanterns of hypocrites and fools. The superstitious sentiment itself needs explanation. The human need requires divine help. The premises that have led men into the false demand a revelation of the true. The soul of man, tossed upon this changeable element of life, looking out upon this sea of mystery, has discerned *something*, and "cries out for fear."

2. Let us, in the next place, consider the answer that comes from the side of human *reason*. What, then, has *science* to say that has a bearing upon the

attitude of man towards the supernatural and the unknown? It says very wise things and very effective things concerning the folly and misery of all superstition. It lays its hand upon fact and nature, and explodes the fables, the grotesque and ugly traditions, that have prevailed for countless generations. How beautiful and beneficent have been its offices in this way! What baneful, cruel, and wicked customs has it abolished forever! What a heavy burden of fears has it removed! What light and order and peace and progress have followed upon its discoveries! What confidence has it inspired in simple truth! How forcibly it has taught us to forego our flimsy conceits, and rely upon reality! How close the connection it has made known between a sound mind and a sound body, and so established a gospel of physical righteousness! The telescope, the microscope, the spectroscope, the crucible, have pierced and shattered and dissolved the upholstery of illusions, and laid open to our eyes a universe of unexplored wonders, all bound about with a web of inflexible yet beneficent laws. "Law," that is the answer which science delivers to man, seeking to know the things beyond his senses and the powers that be, "law, order, and a wondrous transformation yet sublime unity of forces."

And it may be, that, in this revelation of science, some things are assailed to which we cling, some things seem to dissolve that we supposed were the

eternal foundations of our faith and our hope. It is an age of *revolutions*, not only on fields of political contest: more silent but mightier than these, nay, the subtle and hidden progenitors of these, are the revolutions of human thought, the conflicts of fact and opinion, of divine truth and man-made creeds. Look at the ground-swell of agitation and controversy that sweeps not only through minor sects, but washes into the venerable courts of established churches, every now and then heaving in some notable crest from the professor's chair and the bishop's throne. Some venturesome book comes out, and presently the sky is darkened with books of criticism and rejoinder: the press vomits books, the air rains books, the shops are deluged with books, each and all represented to be an infallible refutation of the obnoxious book, which, at the same time, we are assured, is too weak to require any refutation, while ten thousand pulpits pour in a monotonous chorus to the general tune. In the mean time, undisturbed by all these surgings of theological antagonism, science calmly pursues its researches, and announces its conclusions. Those conclusions, which only report God's work and will in nature, we must accept; nor need we be alarmed lest a particle of the divine word should give way under whatever revelations may be made of "the antiquity of man," or "the origin of species." Only we must not imagine that our particular creed alone will prove to be identical with

that word, or that our fear is an evidence of our faith. There may be a decay of creeds, there never will be a decay of religion. And yet these times of revolution are anxious times. It is always a fearful hour, that twilight of confused beliefs, when old convictions are gliding away, when new convictions have not yet clearly dawned. When, looking out upon this sea of human speculation, men cannot discern what form is advancing towards them, they instinctively cry out for fear. They may mistake the beneficent manifestation of God's own love and truth, the coming of a broader and grander revelation, for some spirit of dreadful omen. But, I repeat, let us not confound our fear with faith. The discussions of the time, growing out of scientific methods, will hurt no sacred thing. If every item of the popular belief is true, then, when the controversy has passed and settled down, that belief will stand all the more distinct in its triumph over the keenest criticism; it will be all the more firmly held, because it will be more intelligently apprehended. On the other hand, if aught imbedded in this popular belief is false, the false ingredient alone will dissolve: God's word, God's truth, will abide. But in this collision science itself must be criticised; and so I proceed still further to ask, what bearing has science upon this fact of human need? How does it satisfy the conditions of man's attitude towards the supernatural and the unknown? For, if it does not meet and fill this

unquestionable want, then it is itself found wanting; then we may discover that in its way it is equally narrow and equally bigoted with that superstition which it has cancelled; then it may be received and honored as authentic in its sphere, but that sphere is not high enough nor wide enough for the compass of the human soul. And such, I think, the result will prove. Law, force, order, these are sublime facts, but are they enough for human nature? Is this all of which we need to be assured? Can you, by furnishing a scientific explanation of the seen, repress man's earnest inquiry about the unseen? Can you, by a revelation of physical truth, satisfy man's moral wants, his homely, and yet how intense, aspirations and hopes and fears? Grand is the immensity that opens above our heads,—sublimely regular those armies of the sky, whose glittering march even then as now flashed over Adam's paradise and Abraham's tent. Beautiful is this band of nature, that links the meanest to the highest in one vast web of sympathetic life. Majestic is the law whose custom was the same, whose decrees were as inflexible, in the geological ages, as in earth and sea and sky to-day. Law, force, order, they are stately facts, but are they sufficient nourishment for the hungering and thirsting soul? What *is* the law? Is it cold necessity, or is it love? Force, has it any alliance with our own voluntary impulses, our irrepressible prayers? Order, is it only the adjustment

of physical mechanism, or does it intimate a divine providence, that carries our humanity in its warm and living bosom? It is useless to preach intellectual limitation or irresolvable ignorance. Man *will* ask what is it that in all and through all bears control; what is it that occupies the unknown? The answer of science is not enough for us, tossed on this life-sea, and in "the fourth watch of the night."

Then it was, when the perplexed disciples were struggling on the deep, that Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. So to our human need, so regarding our spontaneous attitude towards the supernatural and the unknown, has the revelation in Christ come. It has come, not to supersede any truth that came before it, or that may come without it, but to fulfil all truth. It does not compromise between science and superstition,—compromise is not the method of truth. It does not utterly cancel the dim and distorted conviction that has thrilled even in the most fantastic superstition, but rectifies and elevates this conviction. It does not fix the seal of reprobation on that which science has made known; but it reveals its highest relations, and charges its net-work of material laws with spiritual purpose. I repeat, it does not cancel the truth of science, or the truth that inheres in superstition. It does not compromise between them. It sinks beneath; it overflows; it comprehends the truth of both; and it answers those conditions which they

have either perverted, or sought to repress. The two great questions involved with the supernatural and the unknown are "who" and "what." "Who," as concerning the Creator and Controller of life and nature, the sovereign power that governs the issues of our being. To this question superstition replies with that dark and terrible view, to which so many aspects of the universe lend their coloring; to this question Christianity replies by its personal revelation of a Father. The question "what" applies to human destiny, to the result and purport of this conscious being of ours. As to this, science cannot assure us. As to this, Christianity unfolds an endless career, lighted by merciful promise and transcendent hope. The religion of Jesus, then, affords that divine help which is adapted to our human need. This is the form, that, in the mysterious conditions of our existence, *should* come to us over the troubled waters and through the darkness. There is only one voice that is able to say to us, "Be of good cheer, be not afraid." Superstition says, "Be afraid." Science cannot say, "Be of good cheer." Christianity shows us the true ground of fear, the thing of which we should be afraid, in the evil of our own self-will, the sin of our own hearts. But all other fear — fear of that which may come to us from beyond these unlifted veils of time and sense — it dispels in the revelation of a divine power and a divine love, that fills all space, and acts in every process of life and nature.

II. But there is another aspect of things, to which I wish to call your attention before I close. We have been considering the problems which arise from a general view of life and nature, and with which, in the discussions of our speculative age, not only the question of Christianity, but the question of any religion, is involved. In other words, we have been considering the attitude of man towards the *supernatural* and the *unknown*. But the point which I now touch may be more familiar to us. I ask you, then, to consider the attitude of man respecting the *natural* and the *known*; and here, also, you will observe the conditions of human need and divine help.

Reading the narrative connected with the text, as it is unfolded in the different evangelists, we find that those men who "cried out for fear" had been "toiling in rowing." And, I repeat, this condition may come nearer to our experience than the other phase of this transaction. We may not be troubled with the scientific and religious speculations of the age, but we *are* troubled here amidst the perplexities and trials of daily life. In one way or another, no doubt, many of us are "toiling in rowing." Some of us, perhaps, are engaged in that most strenuous and tiresome of all labor,—the toil of pleasure. We have no solid aim, no high purpose in life; we are in pursuit of bubbles that break at our touch, of rainbows that recede as we press on, of islands

of the blest that for a little while delude our vision, and then fade and disappear; we are drawn hither and thither by temptations; we are driven by surges of passion; and, in all this tumult of our inward and our outward life, we need some help that can calm and deliver our souls, a voice with power to say, "Peace, be still!"

Or we are rowing through heavy waves of care, we are vexed with countless ills, and the wind is contrary to us. Whole seas of sorrow, dark and cold, are dashing over us. And yet we *must* toil and row; but we want something to strengthen, to guide, and to inspire us. Our human need calls for divine help. In seasons of gloom, looking out upon the world around us through mists and shadows, perhaps we discern objects at which we shudder, forms which move us to cry out with fear. That which, coming towards us, excites these fears, may itself be a blessing; but we know it not, and we need the divine assurance that can bid us be of good cheer.

Surely our common need, our attitude towards even that which is *known* in our own lives and in the world around us, requires such help as this. We need something that in every form of our experience, in every changeful aspect of life, of nature, of human history, can lift us up, and strengthen us with the conviction of a divine presence and a divine control. We need a voice to cheer us when we "toil in rowing," to assure us when we shrink with fears; yes,

and when at last breaks upon our view that strange, mysterious sea "which rolls round all the world," then shall we need to discern One like him who of old walked on Galilee, One who shall come towards us, saying, "It is I; be not afraid!"

VI.

CONFORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION.

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." — ROM. xii. 2.

IF you will read the verses immediately preceding the text,—the closing verses of the eleventh chapter of Romans,—you will find a striking illustration of the comprehensiveness of Christianity, of its breadth and range. In those verses the apostle lifts us up to the grandest generalization that is to be found in the Bible. Contemplating the sweep of divine providence, and that interchangeable working of God's plan in human destiny, by which, in the end, Jew and Gentile are both to be brought in to the kingdom of heaven, Paul breaks forth in the sublime exclamation, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen."

But in the passage before us, and in the chapter to which the text belongs, we are presented with the *specific* or *human* side of Christianity. Here the apostle recedes from his general view, and comes

down to the individual and personal conditions, out of which this grand result is to flow. For although there is such a striking distinction between the vast operations of the divine plan, and the details of human action, these have a vital relation to each other. At least, the first verse of this chapter indicates a *logical* connection. "I beseech you therefore," proceeds the apostle, — "*therefore*," as a deduction from what has just been said concerning this vast plan of the Almighty, — "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

In one word, the wonderful mercies of God constitute the basis of Paul's appeal in the chapter before us. The burden of that appeal is that we be "not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of the mind." The text brings into view two antagonistic powers, — on the one hand the *world*, on the other the divine element in the soul of man.

It is hardly necessary to say that this term "world" has various meanings in the New Testament. One meaning implies *time*, protracted or continuous time; or it may signify an *age*, — the Messianic as contrasted with the Jewish, or the past as opposed to

the present or coming age ; or it may mean a *state*, the present or visible in distinction from the future and invisible ; or it may indicate the evil principle in antagonism with the good. In fact, we make an equivalent use of the English word "world," and employ it in diverse senses. Sometimes we mean the natural or material world, sometimes the present condition of existence. Again, when we speak of "the world," we refer to society, and still again we mean by it the dominion of evil within and around us. I presume that in the text the word bears, more strictly than any other, this latter signification. Or we might sum up our definitions by using the term "worldliness," meaning thereby a *spirit* or *principle* of evil, pervading the world in all the senses to which I have referred. It is this spirit of worldliness that we are to beware of, and to which we must not be conformed. And it is evident that this spirit may solicit us in all the various forms of what we call "the world." It may invite us in the aspects of the material universe, or through the conditions of our present existence, or in the methods of society, as well as by evil suggestions in our own souls. But the main point is, that we beware of worldliness as a principle of thought and action. We must live in accordance with a very different principle : we must be "transformed by the renewing of our minds."

I am thus particular in defining the term "world," because I wish to avoid two extremes. On the one

hand, I am desirous that the fact which it signifies should not appear to you as a mere abstraction, something incidental to those early Christian ages, but of which nobody is in danger now. I wish it to be understood that "the world," in this evil and dangerous sense, is a reality. And while it is true that to those primitive Christians there was a literal, indeed, an almost total sense, in which "the world" was identical with evil, a sense which does not obtain now, nevertheless, the apostle's exhortation is very applicable even at the present time. But, on the other hand, I would avoid that exaggeration which confounds "the world," in the evil sense, with almost every transaction of our lives. Such a conception is productive of an anxious and morbid state of mind, incompatible with the genuine relations of life. Or else it overshoots its purpose, and leaves us high and dry in religious indifference and practical atheism. Exhorted to avoid "the world," to have no alliance with "the world," without any discrimination of the various senses in which this term is used, men feel that they are called to practise that which is simply impracticable; and so, in their daily life, they thrust aside the injunction altogether. But when we say that the world is to be opposed in the sense of a false and evil principle, that really is in the world, and is identical with many of its methods and ideals, there is clear reason and there is practical force in the exhortation, "Be not conformed to this world."

But now let me proceed to say that we must be vigilant against this spirit, precisely where it is the most subtle and concealed. For it is hardly necessary to tell anybody not to be conformed to evil as a naked principle, a principle showing itself in undisguised ugliness. If the familiar couplet, —

“Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen,”

does not declare a practical truth, it is because vice never is seen in its essence. It is mixed with some element of real or apparent good. It puts on some veil of plausibility, although the veil may be very thin. And, of course, just in proportion to the splendor or completeness of the disguise, vice is dangerous: so in regard to worldliness; as a naked principle, hindering whatever is good, and opposing whatever is true, it does not appear. But it insinuates itself through some good and true thing. Thus, for instance, it may easily become confounded with the love of nature. We may say that delight in the visible world is a legitimate delight. Surely, *this* is not the world against which the apostle warns us, this animated sphere of nature, which God himself has called into being, and kindled with glory. No, this array of earth and sky, and all that in them is, does *not* constitute that evil world to which we must not be conformed. But let us present the case from another point of view. Suppose that this world of

nature becomes to us all in all. Suppose it hides from our eyes the real cause and object of nature, and cheats us into the belief that material things are the whole of things, and that there is nothing higher and better than that which serves our senses. There are those to whom nature virtually does become all this; and when this is the result, then has the spirit of wordliness become confounded with love of the natural world, and we need to be transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Or consider the relations which exist between ourselves and our fellow-men. We say, indisputably, that we ought to love our fellow-men. We are not required by any law of God, or of our own spiritual welfare, to cut ourselves loose from domestic attachments or social communion. The example of Jesus teaches and shows us how to consort with men. Indeed, the truth contained in these assertions at once puts on the majestic aspect of a duty. But all the more perilous is our position, when with this communion with our fellows, with this love for our friends and our neighbors, there blends an influence that moves us to defer to their customs, to yield to their opinions, to see only through their moral atmosphere, and live merely upon the level of their ideals. In these conditions society may become that "world" to which we must not be conformed, but which only they can rise above and resist who are transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Nay, our most spiritual conceptions, our most exalted motives, may become entangled with this subtle spirit of worldliness, even when we think we have renounced the dominion of this world forever. Even our religion may be worldly in its spirit, may be what has been aptly termed "other-worldliness." The objects of our faith in another state of existence may be as sensuous as the objects of our sight are here. The grounds of our obedience to God's law may be as selfish or mercenary as the motives of the miser, the sensualist, or the politician. I fear there are some whose religion is little better than service for hire; who regard heaven as the fulfilment of a promise to pay, and apply the standards of the market to the New Jerusalem.

"The world," then, in the evil sense of the term, is a *spirit*, that is everywhere around us and within us. It creeps into all sorts of shells; it is disguised under all sorts of names. I say, therefore, once more, that the injunction contained in the text is most needed, precisely where this spirit is most likely to be confounded with something that is good and true. Now, proceeding upon this assumption, I hardly know of a more interesting and important test than that which we may apply to the forms and achievements of our modern civilization. For hardly anywhere else can we find so many good and true elements, among which this spirit may insinuate itself. I need not enlarge upon the greatness and

the excellence which appear in all this movement, — the glories of enterprise, the marvels of art, the conquests of science, the improvements in laws and governments, and the material conditions of men. Nor need I say how much of this is the work of Christianity itself, and how much of it serves the purpose of Christianity. But the point is just here; that, if our civilization *is* so great and so glorious, it is precisely among the elements of our civilization that we may expect to find the spirit of worldliness, with its most subtle and potent influences. Admitting the vast preponderance of good, let us see what there is in these results that indicates an influence contrary to that which is wrought by Christianity. Regarding these we may detect the difference between Christian methods, and methods of the world.

I. In the first place, then, we may assert that much of our modern civilization is a process of *conformation*. And in this fact consists much of the glory of our modern civilization. In an unqualified sense, man is not the master of nature. I mean by this, that he does not perform his great achievements by the mere exercise of his will, but through a process of humble pupilage. He learns to control the forces of the material world by submitting to its laws. His triumphs of art and mechanism are simply a conformity to nature, a working with nature, not a mastery over it. For all the work that nature does, man pays in patient study and scrupulous

obedience. Thus he mitigates pain and conquers disease, by discovering and conforming to the laws of health. He learns to use the lightning and make it talk for him, by conforming to the requirements of that mysterious element which pervades the earth and the sky. Let there be the least infraction, to the amount only of a pin's point, and his power in this direction is gone. He has no wand of miracle to supersede law. He must patiently trace out the break in his process, and repair the transgression. And so, throughout the entire circle of achievement, civilization is *conformation*. It is the adjustment of man to the conditions in which he is placed, to the order of the present world. Now, I say that precisely here, where so much good is involved, and whence so much good unquestionably comes, we may detect an evil tendency. Man may be seduced into the belief that not merely great good, but that his only good, is to be gained by conformity. He may forget that there are elements in the world which he should defy, and look beyond, even though he cannot control them. It is well to keep vividly in mind the fact, that in the human soul there is something greater than all material forces, better than wealth, or ease, or worldly achievement. In this universe there are laws which are sublimer than physical laws, and results grander even than our mortal life. There is danger lest this habit of conformity, which is so characteristic of our modern civilization, fasten us down to a mere worldly

level, and saturate all our desires with worldly estimates.

The great peculiarity of our social achievements, then, is conformation. On the other hand, the great peculiarity of the Christian method is *transformation*, —not simply obedience to physical laws and external conditions, but a renewing of the mind. It is a great achievement for man to control new forces *without*: it is a greater achievement for him to unfold new forces *within*. It is a great result, when in this theatre of worldly action he *does* more; but it is a greater result when among all these elements of good and evil he himself *becomes* more. It is a great result, when in the inmost recesses of his being there unfolds a law which forbids all sin, even under the mask of the most splendid gain; when there is awakened a vitality of conscience, which inspires him to make only a beneficent application of mighty instruments, and makes it impossible for him to put them to base uses; when there settles in his soul a sublime patience, by which if he cannot conquer pain he can bear it; and when in the midst of all physical terrors he enjoys a spiritual vision, which pierces through calamity and looks beyond death. When one is brought to such a result, there is no danger from that spirit of worldliness which lurks in the habit of conformity. There have been those who have thus stood above the level of worldly circumstance, and who have spanned all its good with a calculus broad as the eternal heaven.

Doubtless such men there were to whom these very words of the apostle were addressed, — men right in the centre and capital of heathenism, surrounded by every shape of human error and conceit. And although those shapes may have been little more than the glittering veils of dead conviction, the pomps and processions of a power that was fast vanishing from the earth, still, by the superstition of the multitude, the connivance of the philosophers, and the policy of the State, heathenism was in alliance with the passions, the inclinations, and the power of the world. The early Christian at Rome had to maintain his trust against this strong current of opinions and feelings, against the temptations of desire and the temptations of fear. And we know how he *did* maintain that trust. History is eloquent with the living illustration and the bloody testimony of those who were “not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of the mind.” With all the good that we may gain from the method of *conformation*, would it not be well if, in the souls and the lives of men, there were more of the fruit that comes from transformation?

II. Let us, however, proceed to consider two or three points, where the contrasts between the Christian method and the methods of this world are more especially displayed. Observe, then, how largely men are influenced by *excitement*. It might be instructive for any man to ask himself how much of his life is

the product of external pressure rather than inward resolution ; to ask himself how much he drifts with the current, and is carried by the winds, instead of keeping his own course by determined purpose of heart and soul. There is a vast difference between the noble steamship that holds its way, trampling the waves and challenging the gale, because it has an inward force, an iron heart, and breath of vital flame, — there is a vast difference between this and the poor vessel whose iron heart stands still, and that wallows about a charred and melancholy wreck, the sport and victim of the relentless sea. But there may be a difference as great between the man who cherishes the steady light of reason and conscience in his own soul, and by these determines his action, and the man who is perpetually driven by the excitements of time and place. And this tendency is much enhanced by the elements of our civilization. How many people depend upon excitements as the spring of their chief delight, as the aliment of their very being ! In this great city, through which the currents of the world are ever rushing to and fro, what is the proportion of men who find food in their own thoughts, and draw comfort from calm fountains in their own souls ? How many are there who live merely in a newspaper and telegraph world ? They are always whirling in the commotion of something new ; the very breath of their life, as it were, comes panting from the steam-engine, and their nerves are strung

on the electric wire. Thus thousands are swept by action, while comparatively few are inspired by ideas; thus there are a great many thoughts, and but little thinking; thus there is an amount of diffused information out of all proportion to depths of real knowledge; thus many of our social results that look like solid bullion are only electrotyped tin. And thus people, carried out of themselves by the force of external excitement, lose true independence of thought and life. Opinions and habits go with the tide. These men and women live as others live, think as others think, do as others do, and practically adopt the conclusion that one might as well be crammed into a catacomb, or stuck in a mummy-case, as be out of the fashion. Thus we have social epidemics, — epidemics of crime, and epidemics of moral reform; epidemics, or perhaps we must say chronic instances, of municipal corruption, and epidemics of mob law. We get severely bitten with the mania of extravagance; and then comes a financial turn, when it is the fashion to fail. Nay, even religion may become too closely identified with mere excitement. For a season, perhaps, it is manifested in a grand choral burst of devotion; but, when the gust of emotion is over, how much remains of deep, sweet, vital consciousness, — a power of the individual life that unfolds its own visions, and makes songs for the solitary soul, as with John at Patmos, as with Paul in the dungeon at Philippi?

Now, we may say that these tendencies have always been developed in the movements of society, and are inseparable from progress; but I need not tell you how much there is in our modern civilization to multiply and intensify these tendencies. I do not overlook the vast amount of benefit conferred by these facilities of our age, but all the more vigilantly must we guard against the danger involved with them. It is easy to see how by external pressure a man may be carried off his own feet, lose his sense of individual accountability, break down in his moral personality, and, in short, driven to the last results of this influence, become like the charred and wave-washed vessel of which I spoke.

The method of Christianity is not excitement, but incitement. That man is best qualified for the perils, yet not disqualified for the blessings, of the world around him, who is moved, not by pressure from without, but by principle from within, and who in the midst of these changing tendencies holds a purpose; a man whose personality does not dissolve in the social atmosphere around him, but who preserves a rocky identity of faith and conviction, a moral loyalty to his own ideal; a man whose good is not fitful, whose very faults are not from fashion, and who amidst the veering and flawing of worldly winds moves steadily on, borne by "the breath and ventilation of God's own Spirit." A man like this aims not to seem but to be, and cares little what social

stamp he bears, in comparison to his consciousness of God's approving signet within. And such men are the fruits, not merely of civilization in its mighty force of excitement, but of Christianity with its incitement, which, in other words, is a renewing of the mind.

III. Again, the power of our modern civilization is the power of that which is *visible* and *tangible*: the power of Christianity is the power of the *unseen* and the *spiritual*. Present good, present gain, immediate success, these are the conspicuous results of our institutions and instruments, our inventions and discoveries, our laws and governments, and trade and commerce. What vast sovereignty, what subtle temptation, in this possession of the present, in that visible dollar which I make by my compliance, compared with the inward blessing which follows my sacrifice; in the concrete fact which I can grasp in my hand, or describe in a title-deed, compared with the abstraction which I do not see, and that only flits in transient vision before my inward eye! Some of the grandest achievements of modern civilization are achievements for the present world and the present time. Quicker realization, more rapid results, are powerful incentives in all this movement. Cancel space, outstrip time, bridge oceans with steam until they shall seem like rivers, twitch nations together with electric arteries until each can feel the other's breath! Let us have concrete good, let us

have immediate acquisition! If some subtle force has been plucked from the secret cabinet of nature, let it be precipitated at once in a salable commodity; harness it to some use, set it to driving the wheels of progress! Ours is a famous civilization for *realizing*: it contrives to make principles pay; it combines dollars with doctrines, and profits with purification.

You perceive that I recognize not only the beneficent elements of civilization, but also the working of the spirit of the world among these elements; and that, while some of its achievements necessarily and nobly appear in immediate and concrete results, this very process carries with it the peril of absorption in immediate estimates: thus we are led to take for our standards of profit and loss merely sensuous and worldly standards.

Now, no instructed and reasonable Christian, and one can hardly be a genuine Christian who is not instructed and reasonable, undervalues concrete facts and interests. Indeed, he is in the most favorable position for rightly appreciating these. The man who starts from great principles, and who pays due regard to abstractions, is not one who is most apt to overlook the real interests of the world. It is a mistake to suppose that fanatics are men who are especially devoted to abstractions. The truth is, that fanatics do not regard abstractions; they do not survey principles in their comprehensive sweep, but mix

their own conceits with concrete facts. I repeat, no true Christian undervalues the real good of the world. But he also regards a higher good. He believes that for the real purposes of this life, as well as of all life, we need something besides steam and telegraph, and currency and ballot-boxes. We need to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. We need the Christian method, that sways the souls of men and the spirit of nations, by a power superior to that which is visible and tangible. We need that which delivers man from sensual illusion and the lust of immediate attainment, by fixing his eyes upon the glory of spiritual rectitude, the victory of postponement, and the gain of sacrifice. Who doubts that we need to-day the same spirit as that which of old led men to abandon houses, and lands, and all earthly good, for God's truth, and the advancement of his kingdom? I do not say that this is always literally required of us; but I do say we need that clear and loyal recognition of eternal realities which would make us ready to do this. And if this seems strange, old-time, Judæan doctrine, such strangeness only proves how the gospel according to the New Testament differs from the gospel according to the nineteenth century. It only shows how the noblest elements may yet be lacking in our civilization.

IV. Once more, I observe that civilization produces its most marked effect *without*, while the Christian element works *within*. So far as the manner of

working is concerned, the suggestions arising under this head have been anticipated, in my remarks concerning excitement and incitement. I speak now, however, not of methods, but of *products*, of *consequences*. The best thing accomplished by civilization, in the ordinary definition of that term, is adjustment to the world. The tests and fruits of civilization are better outward conditions, a better social state, better houses and lands and means of communication: its proof appears in a law or a machine or an institution. And in all this we may discern the legitimate working of Christianity. It bids us do all this, and enjoy all this; make the most of it, but above all make the best of it. Nevertheless, it is only the most familiar of truisms, to say that man's life is not merely in outward things. Nay, his real life is not in outward things at all. New forces may leap from the womb of nature. We may acquire more materials of comfort, and instruments of progress. But the substance of human personality does not change. It cannot be changed merely by these external agents. In its joys and sorrows, its good and evil, its wants and capacities, it is the same as it was six thousand years ago. Strip the man of the nineteenth century of these externals, and how much is he like the man of ages since! With the telescope we see farther, but do we really see *more*, than Abraham at the door of his tent, or Job gazing upon the Pleiades? If we do, then it

may be affirmed that whatever of larger vision or substantial good has come to us has come *within*. It has come in more comprehensive truth, in a broader and more consecrated love, in more perfect assurance of permanent and final good. And, wherever these results are wrought within us, we can dispense with much that is merely outward and palpable. The Christian method, then, is superior to the world, in the fact that it renews the mind, enlarges it, fills it, and opens within springs of enduring peace and power.

Nay, it would be easy to show how all genuine outward progress comes from the renewing of the mind; that all beneficent revolutions, all radical improvements, are wrought by forces of human thought and purpose; that the great, new issues of the world require new men. It is, however, enough to be assured that what we are, what we receive and hold within, is the essential consequence. Let us, then, not be deluded by the spirit of the world, so strong and so victorious in our day, to imagine that any radical good or gain is outward good or gain. Let us remember that the essential fact is the man himself, not his circumstances. Faith, patience, love, the mind of Jesus, pray for these, strive for these; and gaining these, holding these, let us do what we can for the world around us, carrying into it the force of these elements in which is fulfilled the end of our own true inward being. Yet the time

comes when the world to us will be as nothing. But while it recedes, crumbles, slips, fades away, *we* shall not fail. We shall perish with no perishing thing, being "not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of the mind."

VII.

JOHN AND HEROD.

"It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead." —
MARK vi. 16.

THESE were the words of Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who, smitten with a guilty passion for the wife of his brother Philip, persuaded her to abandon her disinherited husband, for the honors of a court, and the rank of a reigning princess. The intrinsic guiltiness of this act was expressed in a double wrong. Not only had Herodias forsaken Philip, but, for her sake, Antipas had repudiated his own wife. I fear that in human history we might frequently find parallels for this transaction, and instances as conspicuously stamped with shame. But surely such sin in high places has not always encountered such direct and fearless rebuke. However, in those times, there was one man, — a man who in deserts and solitary places had been trained to hear the call of duty, and to obey the voice of God, — there was one man who dared confront even that lawless despotism. "It is not lawful

for thee to have her," said John the Baptist. The utterance of that truth discharged his conscience, but it cost him his head. Yet there are some men who had rather be without a head than without a conscience; and John was one of this kind. He had offended a sovereign, and that was a dangerous thing to do. But he had done what was much more dangerous,—he had aroused the anger of a vindictive woman. The passage that follows the text presents a most vivid picture. Indeed, I hardly know where to look for an incident in which the elements of evil,—sensuality, crime, cruelty—are more strikingly combined. There appears a weak, voluptuous king, impelled by his passions, yet awed by a vague sense of right; now listening to the incitements of his paramour; now restrained by fear of the people; now influenced by a sort of moral respect for the bold preacher whom he had imprisoned. Then there are the occasion for vengeance, artfully seized upon, the triumph of a dancing-girl, the drunken and applauding crowd, the oath passed in haste and fulfilled in cowardice, and, as it seems likely within the very same walls, a festival and a tragedy, the mixing of wine and blood. Above, the dainties and the revelry; below, the martyr, pale and gory; while, behind all, working through all, appears the worst thing that can be found in the whole world,—a wicked woman.

These transactions present for our consideration two points:—

I. A self-revelation.

II. A contrast.

I. The text, with a single stroke, lays open before us the mind of Herod. After the death of John the Baptist, the fame of Jesus spread abroad; and, as might be expected, the minds of the people were much excited concerning him. Some said that this extraordinary teacher, this doer of mighty works, was Elijah returned to earth again. Others, not so certain as to his personality, said that Jesus was one of the old prophets. But Herod exclaimed, "It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead." Thus, then, did he betray the guilty remembrance that haunted his soul. In this exclamation we have a truth of human nature, a truth which Shakspeare has put in the mouth of the murderer of Banquo: —

"Now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools," —

a truth which often starts out from the depths of the human soul, — the truth of *conscience*.

The question as to Herod's opinions about a future state, or at least the opinions which he may have professed, whether he was a Sadducee and disbelieved in the resurrection, or was a Pharisee and believed in it, so far as the present instance is con-

cerned, is of little importance. Deeper than mere speculation, below all the apathy of worldliness, there exists in man some conviction of spiritual reality and of moral obligation. This betrayed itself in Herod the moment his nature was jarred by the shock of extraordinary circumstances. The awe of Christ's marvellous works awoke the solemnities of even that debased nature. Deep called unto deep. The vibration of miraculous power brought up the secret shapes of conscience, as it is said the vibration of cannon will bring drowned men to the surface of the water. The form of the murdered Baptist that lay mutilated in the dungeon of Machaerus, that was taken up and buried by his sorrowing disciples, was yet all alive, was yet all unburied, in the recesses of that guilty consciousness. Turning to the Gospel of Luke, we find that the statement concerning this point differs from the statement in Matthew and in Mark. In Luke, instead of the exclamation recorded in the text, Herod is represented as saying, "John have I beheaded: but who is this?" as though he did not for a moment entertain the thought of its being John. But this is quite consistent with the assertion before us. On the one hand, Herod may have first put the question, "Who is this?" until that question dissolved in the fearful thought, "It is John;" or, on the other hand, as the first impulse, he may have exclaimed, "It is John;" and then, as an after-thought, or bracing himself with sceptical hardi-

hood, he may have added, "John have I beheaded: but who is this?" In either case, whether forethought or afterthought, the words of the text are equally significant as a self-revelation of Herod.

Yes, it was all there, — the sense of a deeper and more awful world than this material one in which we stand; the sense of responsibility, which no degree of depravity can entirely smother, which headlong self-will cannot forever elude. A prevalent unbelief may have hung darkly around the tetrarch's mind: the lights of revelry, the schemes of ambition, the tumult of passions, may, as habitual influences, have dispelled all shapes of gloom and ill. But there were times when the lights burned low, and flickered in their sockets; when the curtains of his throne, when the upholstery of his very life, flapped in the wind of eternity; and he felt the crust of the world breaking away from his own soul, and for a moment realized his moral relations, and caught a glimpse of the presence of God. A genuine confession broke forth in those quick words: "It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead."

Yes, it was all there, — the same mysterious substance of nature, the same spiritual consciousness, in Herod the Tetrarch, as in John the Baptist, — in any other man as in Herod the Tetrarch. It is a solemn fact, that it is from the same ground and root of action that all men start. That which most distinguishes men from all other creatures; that which,

with all their diversities, still makes them most alike, — is the sense of right and wrong, — the feeling, although it may be a very vague one, of their relation to unseen realities. In no sense can we regard even the most degraded man as a mere animal. In the grossest forms of excess, which it is injustice to the brute to call “beastly,” there broods the shadow of an awful *desecration*, of fine gold tarnished, of a glorious inheritance profanely cast away. In crime, in vice, in reckless self-abasement, in meanness of all sorts, we always contrast actualities with *possibilities*; powers possessed, with ends achieved. “What he *might* have been,” “What he *ought* to be,” is the solemn consideration that leaps into our minds as we stand before the self-abused victim of appetite and passion. A majesty far above the brute appears even in this transformation of grossness. There is a glory set in humanity, there is the image of God, even in the form that lies prostrate in the dust. Let the foul exhalations of sin be for a moment blown aside, and we might see the far deep heaven of that immortal nature with its coronet of stars. I cannot think that this is extravagant language concerning any man, when I mark the solicitude with which Christ “came to seek and to save the lost;” thus, even in lost humanity, discerning something worth saving; assuring us that the angels rejoice at its recovery with the joy of the woman who discovers her lost piece of silver; with the joy of the shepherd who

finds his lost sheep, and brings it home upon his shoulders. I see that the great event in the career of the prodigal, the point of moral recovery, was "when he came to *himself*. Therefore, I infer that in every man there is a self to come to; there is some noble element holding of that which is spiritual and eternal, often sunk like treasure in the depths, but not beyond recovery; like Herod's consciousness of spiritual things, buried under thick deposits of sensuality, benumbed by practical atheism, yet at times starting to the surface, as when he cried out, "It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead!"

Now, this spiritual substance, in which man differs widely from all other creatures, and in which all men are most alike, is both a point of *recovery* and a ground of *condemnation*. I say, in the first place, this is a point of *recovery*. It is something very different from mere platitudes about "the dignity of human nature," or a weak emotion that baptizes saints and sinners with an indiscriminate sentimentalism: it is something very different from this, that asserts the moral possibility of all men through the agency of their spiritual consciousness. In the case of the vilest and most unrelenting, we have a right to affirm this spark of hope, this vital germ shooting up through the darkness of their nature, which proclaims their alliance with something nobler than flesh or sense; which appears whenever conscience

manifests itself, or the soul confesses the presence of eternal realities. In the worst man, — though his nature, like Herod's, be enslaved to passion, though his hand, like Herod's, be stained with blood, — there *is* this profound relation to spiritual things. In some way they are acknowledged. And, however vile the man may be, it is a sign of hope and a point of recovery.

But this spiritual consciousness is also a ground of *condemnation*. They make a capital mistake who suppose, that, by disparaging human nature, they enhance the fearfulness of human guilt. Responsibilities are in proportion to capabilities. In the reckoning for talents *used*, we rate as a decisive element the amount of talents *possessed*. The depth of a man's fall must be measured by the dignity of his original position. Just in proportion as he was originally and essentially bad, he has *not* fallen. Argue the abstract point as we may, we cannot brand with the same mark of guilt the vagrant boy whose faculties have unfolded in the foulest atmosphere of vice and crime, the abandoned girl whose plunge into shame was impelled by hunger and despair, — we cannot apply the same brand of guilt to these as to the man, who, in spite of strong moral promptings and clear intellectual light, has chosen the evil course, and wrought with abominable means. Oh! it is in high places, in circles of ambition and of pride, where men sell justice for

gold, and their country for a mess of pottage, and rate principle by the price-current ; it is in homes of luxury, and saloons of gilded pomp, amidst refinement and ceremony, where women of little principle and wicked will, the Herodias of fashionable life, desecrate household sanctities, and break laws that are both human and divine. It is here, among the flaunting roses and dahlias of the social world, that guilt shows its real blackness, and sin utters its condemnation, but *not* where the poor desecrated human flower is wilting in the street, or the miserable weed lies rotting by the wall.

And if thus we estimate individual men and women as guilty according to the measure of their intelligence and capacity, such must be our estimate concerning the race as a whole. Therefore, the real ground of condemnation is in those very elements, which, as I have just shown, constitute a sign of hope and a point of recovery. The ground of condemnation is in that knowledge of good and evil, that intense recognition of spiritual things, which broke out in the exclamation of Herod : it is in that power of choice, which, exerted this way or exerted that way, either delivers us from temptation, or leads us into evil.

Is not that, then, a wonderful lesson gleaming out in the Gospel record, — a master-stroke of truthfulness, very suggestive for ourselves and for all men, — this confession of conscience on the part of Herod ;

this unguarded opening into the secret chambers of his soul; this sudden outcry from the inner depths, "It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead"? Let no man delude himself, by any manner of sophistry, with the notion that the evil of his guilt ends with the guilty act, or that the wrong which he has done lies buried in his memory as in a grave. It may lie as in a grave; but there will be trumpet-blasts of resurrection, when conscience calls, and memory gives up its dead. "Confessions of faith," so called, may be sincere, or they may be heartless and formal. Yet the most genuine confessions of faith are not expressed in any creed or catechism, but in utterances of the moment, that come right out of the heart. So Herod made *his* confession of faith. So might any man be startled by his own self-revelation.

II. But the text also suggests a point of *contrast*. The contrast is between Herod, and John whom he beheaded. Here are two different types of men, — a type of worldliness, and a type of moral heroism. Two different types of men; and yet let it not be considered a mere play upon words, when I say not two types of different men. For, as we have just seen, these two characters started from a common ground. Beneath all external and all moral contrasts lay the same essential humanity. The self-willed and voluptuous king was forced to acknowledge the same spiritual realities as those in reference to which John so steadfastly acted.

But starting from this common root, see how unlike these two men were in the *branching* of their lives. Herod, I repeat, is a type of worldliness. In the first place, he illustrates the sensuality of the world, the imperious domination of appetite and passion. The face of the tetrarch of Galilee passes before us at this day, in the face of hundreds inflamed by excess, — the exuberance of the animal usurping the regal front of the man. He comes before us in men whose lives are license, and who treat the world as a mere garden of the senses ; who obey only the impulse of the hour, careless of any restriction and of any law. Men who doubtless have the talent of a soul, but they wrap it in an epicurean napkin ; so when by and by God calls for it, it is only a collapsed soul, with smothered possibilities, or a soul with the clods of corruption clinging to it. These men are not without a dim perception of better things lying about somewhere in the universe. Many of them have even a sort of muddled respect for religion, or at least for religious truth. I think it one of the most striking traits in the passage before us, that, despot, sensualist, and perhaps Sadducee, as he was, Herod “feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him ; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.” Undoubtedly these men know that there *is* something far better than their own lives ; and, when it comes along, they confess its presence. Certain great realities of

existence for a moment flicker in solemn splendor upon their souls; as, for a moment, a star casts its image quivering upon the surface of a stagnant pool.

And I put in another qualification here. Some of these may really be better men than those whose outward life is perhaps cleaner. There is more hope that something good may come out of such as these, than out of some smooth, leopard-skinned formalist, who never did an illegal thing, and never cherished a noble one. You know what Jesus said to some of the priests and politicians of his time: "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." I cannot believe that the worldling, so far as he is merely a sensualist, is utterly steeled against better influences. There may be some grain of purity in his heart. Death, for a moment, casts upon him the shadow of its moral, and at times he listens respectfully to divine truth. For the occasion he is inclined to do "many things." But, after all, these are the mere instruments of impulse, the floats of appetite. Thus the man who an hour ago was so grave at church or funeral, an hour hence may be venting profaneness or reeking in debauch. Appetite and passion ruled Herod; and, when the divine law thwarted these, they proved too strong for any impulse of conscience, and the fearless prophet lost his head.

But there appears in Herod another phase of worldliness, — the phase of policy. I do not mean wise policy, but policy divorced from principle. Herod had no honest independence: he vacillated with the wind. He feared the people, and so he did not put John to death. But then, again, he feared his companions who heard the oath that he made to Salome; and he did put John to death. Left to himself, perhaps he would have spared the Baptist, and even released him. But his subservience to his wicked wife, his wish to appear consistent, if not his own inclinations, moved him to act as he did, — to imprison a brave man, and to shed the blood of an innocent man, just because that man had spoken the truth.

Now, I suppose there are a great many such men in our day, — men who, on the whole, are disposed to honor truth, to eulogize it, even to put it foremost, if just as well for themselves. But they would imprison it, behead it, and send the desecrated head around in a charger, if they could gain votes or get pleasure by doing so. With these men there is one difficulty, and it is a huge difficulty. They apparently have no core to their hearts, and you cannot tell whether they are sincere or not. For instance, they profess public virtue, but it is a virtue for the time: it is like a counter, and moves with the game. At least, we can have but little confidence concerning such people, so long as we feel that their method

is not principle, but policy. As to a mere sensualist, we can make some calculation. He is tolerably sincere. He is sincerely vicious. This or that vice is his ideal, and he sticks to it. But as to the man of policy, one cannot tell whether he even sincerely serves the devil. One thing, however, we may confidently assume, — whether such men profess religion, or patriotism, or love of the people, or any thing else, they are sincere in serving *themselves*.

Herod was “sorry” when Salome asked for the head of John. But “sorry” for what? Was it on account of respect and love for the prophet? or was he sorry because he feared popular indignation? or because he felt that this was going a little too far in cruelty and injustice? Men are sorry in various ways. One is sorry for his sins, and another is sorry for his scruples. One is sorry that he made a fraudulent profit, and another is sorry that he did not. One, with strong anguish, mourns the loss of a friend, and another the loss of a fortune. One sheds drops of pity, and one of mortification. The mother is sorry for her dead babe that lies upon her breast like a withered blossom, and the miser is sorry to part with a dollar. Sorrow is not always divine, and tears are not always of the kind that consecrate. In Herod’s case it is quite significant that we cannot exactly tell *why* he was sorry. One thing we know, that his sorrow was not strong enough to stop the hand of the executioner, and keep himself from

crime. It was not strong enough to resist the sense of shame, and the impulse of the hour.

Moreover, Herod was obedient to a false code of honor. "For his oath's sake, and for the sake of them that sat with him," he commanded that John should be beheaded. It is a question whether the oath alone would have been regarded by him. But a bad promise, coupled with the fact that others had heard it, *was* strong enough. To make such an oath was bad; to keep it was twice bad. Yet there are strange paradoxes in this world. There are men whose reputation for "honor" is based upon their dogged faithfulness in doing mean things, and whose reputation for courage illustrates their cowardice. Herod's oath may be classed with the morality of the gaming-table: his fear of those who sat with him is the inspiration of the duellist. Men neglect their debts of just dealing, their debts to broken-hearted wives and needy children, to pay their forfeits of ivory and pasteboard, and call this paying "debts of honor"! For fear of those who sit with him, a brother takes a brother's life, or loses his own, to prove himself a man of courage; thus proving himself a moral coward. Yes, fit type of a base worldliness even here, of elements that are planted in no eternal depths, and live in no vital principle, is that tetrarch of old. King Herod still sits in the gamester's mask, and writes his code in crimson lines where earth proclaims to heaven a

violated life. So had worldliness mixed with the essential conditions of humanity in Herod.

Not so with John the Baptist. For whatever he may have been moved to do by special inspiration, whatever depended upon the peculiarity of his mission, still we may regard him as a type of moral heroism. He is a type of one true to the highest ideal, and to the claims of conscience. There was a sense in which "the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he." One far mightier came after him,—one who is our true pattern. Nevertheless, a noble character is that of John the Baptist, with his self-devotion and his rocky heroism. His biography is fragmentary. We catch only glimpses of him in his quick passage across the stage of action, from the hour of his marvellous birth, to the time when, coming into the wild region of the Dead Sea, he assumed the garb of the old prophets, took up the burden of their spirit, and summoned men to "repent." And but a moment more we see him in the presence of the guilty king, and through the bars of a dungeon; and then he lies in his martyr-blood. But, wherever we see him, we discern the same brave, true man,—a man who has been loyal to his own moral sense, and who has grown straight from its roots; a man who, however he may err, however he may suffer, will never be haunted by the ghost of some violated duty or some ghastly wrong, saying, "It is I: I have risen from the dead!"

It was easy perhaps to be austere in the desert, or to be bold to the multitude. Whether the minister's pulpit be a rock, or a stump, or carved wood and velvet, it is easy for him to be courageous *there*,—it is easy to be upright there. He has it all his own way. Circumstances make men exceeding bold. But to enter the charmed circle of greatness and power, to speak the truth when it strikes like lightning and hits sovereign sins,—who will do that? John did it. He was the same before Herod as before the people; the same when he had to confront a man who could take his life, as when he spoke to the penitent who came trembling to his baptism. He stood up before this gross, imperious Herod; and under all that robed majesty he saw only a man,—a man with a conscience that needed to be pierced, and with a spiritual nature estranged from God. And he spoke as to a guilty, immoral man, "It is not lawful for thee to have her!" That was what I should call "personal preaching." Not very polite perhaps, but incisive and to the point.

All men, however faithful and earnest they may be, are not cast in the mould of John the Baptist, or tempered to such a quality. But such a soul crying out in the world does the world good. It is refreshing to see the moral heroism of John set sharp against the worldliness of Herod.

But, in closing, let us consider the *fruit* and *consummation* of these two lives thus brought in contrast.

Herod, so far as we can trace him in the New Testament history, sits there flushed and powerful over his wine ; sees his bloody order executed ; sees the gory head of his victim carried by, and vanishes from our sight in luxury and splendor. But John lies cold and still below, the brave heart motionless, the prophet tongue silent, no more to utter its fearless rebuke or its warning cry. And thus at first we may be moved to exclaim, "O young man, cut off untimely, and bleeding at the feet of brutal wrong ! O sad record of mortal failure ! O mournful defeat of the hero on the field, so beautiful even in the death of the hero ! The world's evil too strong for you. The world's power triumphant. O sad type of many a defeat of many a fallen cause ! Such, then, is the upshot of these two lives, — Herod victorious in his wickedness ; John in his moral loyalty defeated and slain."

But we do not, we can not, say this. We form a different estimate than this of John and Herod. Even in the conditions of this world and of time, we hear the tetrarch crying out, "It is John, whom I beheaded : he is risen from the dead !" We see him driven into exile, and dying an inglorious death. We see, too, the Baptist, in the processes of his truth, going abroad throughout the earth in "the spirit and power of Elias."

So, in other instances, we are to judge not by the transient event, or the aspect of the hour, but by the

prevailing influence, the product that abides. Truth conquers in the long run, and right vindicates itself against the wrong, as "John risen from the dead." Thus in private instances, your bosom sin, your neglected duty, forgotten, exorcised, rises again to haunt you. And no man now hesitates in his verdict between the tetrarch of Galilee and the preacher of the wilderness.

"All Scripture is given for instruction." Your decision as to these two types of men is not merely concerning Herod, or concerning John: it concerns yourself. For, practically, you *do* decide. And what is this practical decision? Is it in line with the ruler, or with the prophet? Let me ask you, in your daily conduct, in your ideal and your purpose, are you unfolding the life-fruit of Herod, or the life-fruit of John?

VIII.

THE FALLACY OF EVIL.

"But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain." — 2 KINGS xi. 2.

THE transaction with which the text is connected belongs to that series of bloody events which were involved with the destruction of the house of Ahab. Among those who were slain in the fierce onslaught of Jehu, was Ahaziah, king of Judah. Hearing of his death, his mother, Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, — her daughter in disposition as well as by birth, — resolved to secure the kingdom of Judah for herself; and to that end, she put to death, as she supposed, the entire brood of her own grandchildren; and having perpetrated this unnatural slaughter, she ascended the vacant throne. But the text informs us that to this wholesale murder there was one exception. Joash, the infant heir of Ahaziah, was by his aunt, Jehosheba, wife of Jehoida the high-priest, snatched from the fury of the usurp-

ing queen, and concealed in the Temple. Athaliah maintained her guilty reign for six years. It was a cruel, oppressive, and idolatrous reign, sternly calculated to foment the opposition of all who were loyal to the legitimate government and the ancient religion, and to cement their union. At length Jehoida, under oath, disclosed his secret to some of the chief men of the Jewish nation, and, having secured the alliance of the military and the priesthood, broke out with a successful revolution. Upon a day appointed, the guard and the people having assembled in the Temple, Jehoida brought the young Joash out before them. Having anointed and crowned him, the people clapped their hands, shouting, "God save the king!" Hearing the tumult, Athaliah entered the Temple, and there encountered the startling spectacle of the lawful heir to the throne with the diadem on his head, and an army ready for his defence. The alarmed queen rent her clothes, and cried "Treason! Treason!" But her voice was drowned by the blast of the trumpets and the acclamations of the multitude. She was immediately seized, dragged beyond the precincts of the Temple, and put to death.

I have selected this incident because it affords a suggestion which the text makes especially emphatic. It is quite possible, that in the blindness of her fury Athaliah did not stop to reckon the exact number of her victims. At any rate, — bent upon her ambi-

tious purpose, and snatching the reins of empire with hasty and bloody hands,—she supposed that she was safe. That sacrificial pile made for her secure steps to the throne. But, according to the narrative before us, in the very day of her triumph were planted the seeds of retribution, and in the person of that rescued infant they were growing close by her side. It seems to me, then, that this entire transaction suggests the fallacy of evil, the falsehood of sin. And so this incident of a very ancient time is applicable to all time. To some it may appear a very superfluous task to urge an argument against evil in itself. Up to this point it may seem that all argument is foreclosed. It may be thought that the very term “evil” suggests all the argument that is necessary. Of course there may be many instances when the question will arise, whether this or that really *is* evil. But this point being made clear, it may be assumed that no further discussion is required; for everybody condemns evil. The moral sense of every man repudiates it.

Nevertheless, evil prevails; not often, it is to be hoped, in such shapes of conspicuous and revolting wickedness as in the case of the Jewish queen, but in countless other shapes, both in public and in private. And how many there are for whom it is not enough to say that this thing or that thing is evil. Either they do not, or they will not, see it as it is. They do not practically condemn it, because it is sustained by

some kind of sophistry,—sophistry, very likely, growing out of superficial conceptions of the nature and conditions of evil. In order to meet such instances, then, it does not seem superfluous to urge the argument, or, at least, an argument against evil. I by no means assume that any such argument is in itself a *converting* process. The roots of evil are in the human heart; and what is truly called “the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ” is the only power that can lay hold of it, and draw it out. But it is necessary to attack the outworks before we can besiege the citadel. It is necessary to demolish the props of sin, in order that men may feel their essential weakness in sin. Speaking, then, not of evil in its origin, or in its more subtle relations in the heart of man, but in practice,—in acts and habits and methods,—let us, in some respects at least, see how the argument makes against it.

In the first place, I ask you to consider the *insecurity* of evil. This is very clearly illustrated in the incident before us. Athaliah’s scheme was a sweeping one. It was summary in its execution. The argument which she employed was the sword; and it seemed as though all obstacles had gone down before it.

But one point was left exposed, and through that point entered destruction. And it is wonderful how common such mistakes are, even in the most cunningly planned iniquity. When the evil-doer has arranged

all his devices, and they seem to be turning out just as he would have them turn out, very often he seems smitten by judicial blindness, and he leaves some clew by him unperceived. Or we may say Providence gathers up some witness in its concealing folds, and lo! all at once it leaps out upon him. Take some of the grosser instances of iniquity. The thief, as he supposes, clears away every thread of detection; but, in the most unthought of way, the keen eye of justice picks out some slender filament of guilt, and presently the entire web is dragged into the light. The calumniator constructs his charge so plausibly, that as it seems his victim can find no flaw for escape, when accidentally some minute test of truth is applied, and the lie shrivels, and shows all its blackness. The murderer drops some bloody hint of his deed. He makes a footmark in the leaves, or babbles his secret in the revelations of a dream. Or, years afterward, some token that he has foolishly retained betrays him; or some mouldering skeleton bursts from its hiding-place, and proclaims his doom.

But let us proceed to the consideration of less conspicuous instances. A man conducts business on a system of petty frauds. For a while they glide quite smoothly, and he secretly chuckles at his own practical demonstration that *dishonesty* is the best policy. But in time his meanness gets wind: custom drops off, and he sinks in credit. Or his good fortune, if

good fortune he has, is tainted by his reputation. Men will worship a golden calf for the sake of the gold; but there is apt to be a polite sniffing at gilded carrion.

Another finds it convenient, now and then, to oil the hinges of opportunity with a little lying. Quite likely he does so with very slight compunction or thought. It may serve his purpose. Very possibly it will do so. And yet it is just as possible that he will find a nest of trouble in it. Perhaps, in some unlucky moment, the truth strikes him flat in the face, and brings him to open shame. Or he has to fabricate a series of lies to support the first, until the chain breaks of its own weight, or tangles and trips him; and it turns out that it costs more to keep a set of lies in tune than it would to have told the truth in the outset. Talk of losing by the truth, of not affording to speak the truth, of getting old fashioned, and being left high and dry in the great swirl of competition, by telling the truth! I maintain that nothing is so safe as truth, nothing stands all kinds of hard knocks like truth, nothing comes out so clear and complete as the truth. A man who cannot afford to lose money by speaking the truth, and who has enthroned himself on lies, is always likely to encounter some uncomfortable Joash that will bring him down.

Then, again, there are some evil devices that one cannot carry out alone,—they must be helped by

other people; and this creates the insecurity of participated counsel. The confederate may be bribed to treachery, or become conscience-stricken. At least we may be quite sure that one who will connive at fraud or mischief can have but slight anchorage in principle; and no seal of "honor" so-called, or even of interest, is strong enough to assure the wrong-doer that he is not plotting with a town-tattler or a State's evidence.

Now, I am well aware that this is only *one* argument against evil, and that with some it may reach but a very little way. There are many, I fear, who act upon the principle of running the risk, believing that in such matters the average gain will pay all losses. They shrewdly remark, that the doctrine of "getting found out" is simply a bugbear of the preacher or the moralist, which may be efficacious in keeping boys and girls upon their good behavior, but which rests upon no wide range of facts. Even murder does not always "come out;" and lesser sins are apt to escape with impunity, or are lost sight of in success. I presume there are men who will not be deterred from a gainful fraud, or a mean policy, by any fear that the lie will be detected, or the fraud exposed. I admit that this danger of detection is not a very lofty argument. "Honesty is the best *policy*" does not occupy a high place in the catalogue of moral sanctions. The man who has gone no farther than this on the road of virtue has not gone far.

The doctrine of consequences is a doctrine of secondary considerations, which a good man does not want, and which a bad man means to dodge. And that is a very ungodly sorrow which is only sorry for the exposure. Nevertheless this is one argument against evil: its methods and its instruments are *insecure*. Good men will make mistakes. Good men will commit oversights. Perhaps they are more likely to do so than those of the other class. Trusting simply to the right, they may not keep their wits so keenly on the alert. Men who undertake to engineer a bad enterprise are very apt to be what are called "smart men." There are not many downright wicked fools. It is quite possible, that, for a time, the knaves will foil mere righteousness; and, where cleverness is the only point in consideration, they may show themselves superior to those who are simple enough to trust in honesty. A conspiracy against law or rectitude requires more brains, and, for a while, may develop more brains, than are exhibited in defence of it; only, brains are not righteousness, nor truth, nor honor, and in the upshot are not a match for these. And throughout every department of human action, there is this essential difference between fraud and truth, treachery and loyalty, — whatever exposure may take place, the good man has no reason to fear. The exposure may demonstrate that he was weak in judgment, or unskilful in execution; but the right motive will redeem his work. But the least slip

may ruin the knave and unfrock the hypocrite. The short-sightedness of the right intention is an honest mistake; the oversight of the base purpose is a fatal error. Therefore, in the first instance insecurity means a very different thing from what it does in the last. Jehosheba might have been detected, but her death would not have been such a catastrophe as Athaliah's. The sword of usurping wrong that cleaves the true heart leaves no black and blasting wound as does the sword of justice when that falls upon the guilty and the cruel. Even death, that levels all, is not the same incident to all. The honest worker may push on his work in calm confidence, although disappointment may balk him. But let the fraudulent and mean look well to every crevice in the wall. Yes, life is an uncertain sea, and the good as well as the bad may suffer the shipwreck of their hopes. But the one has done the best he could. He has laid a well-intended course, studying his chart, and observing heaven. The other of his own accord has run his ship among quicksands and breakers. Both are liable to mistakes; but, I say once more, the insecurity of the good is not like the insecurity of the bad. The one must be vigilant and humble; the other has great reason to be restless and afraid.

II. There is another argument against evil, akin to that upon which I have just dwelt. This argument appears in the fact, that in any wrong course there is an *intrinsic incongruity*. This truth, perhaps, is

easier felt than expressed. But I may be able to convey some idea of my meaning by saying that evil does not tally with truth. It cannot profoundly and completely simulate the good. In one word, it is contrary to God. Now, I have already admitted that evil methods do sometimes — indeed, I must say do frequently — succeed. Nevertheless, I do not admit that this triumph is a *final* triumph. Very likely it will turn out that the consummated guilt does not set well. It wears a doubtful aspect. Suspicion warps it, although detection may not lay it open. It does not fit snug into the general order. I have spoken of a tainted reputation. And I ask, does not a bad man find it somewhat difficult to hide his real character? The process is apt to develop undue clumsiness, or extra facility, too little heat, or too much zeal. The painting is over-colored; or else it is quite evident that the face is wax and the eyes are glass. Sometimes men put on piety as a covering for meanness. And yet how apt it is to become suspected piety! There is too much of it. It is too thick and garrulous. There is no superfluity in the genuine quality, nor in any thing that God has made. At least the semblances used by evil are not *just like life*. I grant, that, to the common vision, they may often appear so. They may lurk unknown, and all may look fair. The knave may pass for an honest man, and the hypocrite for a saint. But, then, there is danger in the fact that the thing *is* simulated. All

reality, and all the currents of God's providence, are against it. There is some method, some microscope, or acid, or alkali, that can expose its baseness. Some time since, I was examining a sample of ore that looked very much like gold: I was informed that the material has often been taken for gold. Perhaps in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand it would pass for gold. Is there, then, no test by which it may be distinguished from the nobler metal? Yes: *it does not weigh quite so much as gold.* So base-metal acts, that look like shining gold, may sometimes get weighed. Some years ago, in Boston, in the course of a certain trial, great perplexity was occasioned respecting some forged notes. It seemed impossible to distinguish the genuine signature from the counterfeit. At last two of the papers were lapped over each other, and held up against a window through which the strong daylight was streaming, and the difference was made clear. A celebrated lawyer was employed to contest what was believed to be a fraudulent will, which if sustained would entail great distress upon the rightful heirs; yet there was the document, all properly signed and sealed, and duly attested. The lawyer was much perplexed. He scrutinized the will, and turned it over and over. At length he happened to hold it up to the light, and then he saw that the water-mark in the paper bore a more recent date than that of the spurious will. So deeply impressed was he with

the hand of Providence in this detection, that he broke out in devout thanksgiving. Yes, here is the point. Falsehood cannot stand the searching of the light. The wrong is not in all respects like the right. The sinuosities of guilt vary from the handwriting of truth. The wolf will be likely to betray the fact that the sheep's clothing was not made for him, and the trickster may get crowded into conditions that will bring out his shabbiness. At times terrible is the incongruity between the evil course and the smooth appearance. Some of you may have seen a certain engraving, very powerful in its delineation, but very ghastly. It represents a duel after a masked ball. In the early gray of a winter morning the two antagonists have gone out to fight. One of them, partly supported by a friend, is reclining upon the ground, while the blood of his death-wound slowly oozes from his breast. The other is stealing away in the misty distance with the stain of slaughter upon his sword. But the ghastly point in the picture is not simply the catastrophe: it is the awful *contrast*, — the blending of frivolity with tragedy, — the intermixture of demon passions with the relics of the dance; the blood of a violated life staining the gay costume of the masquerade; and the calm look of nature brooding around the transaction, like a solemn judgment morning. So do the elements of sin sometimes burst their glittering disguises; guilty passion glares through all the pro-

prieties ; and in the witnessing presence of God's own universe the intrinsic incongruity of evil appears.

Besides this, we must remember also that wrong always occupies the place of some right. It exists by repressing that right. Therefore it is exposed to the re-action of that right. Referring to instances that are important enough to remain visible above the horizon of time, we find, that, as the world moves, there goes on a rectifying process. Justice sifts and sifts, until the verdict abides with the right, even though "canonized bones" are stirred in their ceremonies, and the graves give up their dead. As we retreat from the past, the eternal disc of truth emerges from temporary obscurations, while on the great ecliptic of history every thing falls into its proper posture. The schemes of wicked policy, and the idols of a deluded veneration, lie crushed and exposed. The memory of the tyrant blackens, and the martyr has his palm. No wrong can go down secure and compact through the ages. It does not assimilate with God's order, and it bears no fertility of blessedness in its bosom. It must break up, it must give way, under the pressure of events. Truth is tidal, like the sea that keeps throbbing in its rocky arteries. It will toss that which encumbers it, like drift-weed ; it will swell over every break-water that has been set to keep it back, until it reaches the mark that God has ordained for it. The celestial movements may seem slow and wearisome : neverthe-

less, "the stars in their courses fight against Sisera." There is no peace for the wicked, though robed in the most splendid success. There is no security for the wrong, however sealed and established. Evil may seem to be as well as the good. But it is *not* as well. Like that guilty Jewish queen, it falsely occupies the throne; and sooner or later justice comes, like the lawful heir, and claims the birthright.

III. But, after all, the great argument against evil is *the essential nature* of evil. At this point I meet those superficial conceptions of which I spoke in the beginning of this discourse. And I suppose that just here we may trace the grounds of much of the wrong conduct and the false policy that prevail in the world. It may be affirmed, at least, that many run into evil courses without any deliberate adoption of the wrong in preference to the right, and yet, on the other hand, without any thought of what the real curse of evil is. They look at things merely on the outside. Thus, the danger of evil seems to be merely external penalty and exposure, while the benefit of goodness is outward profit and reward. Therefore, a man has only to make up his mind to run the risk of these contingencies, and he is very likely to pursue the course into which inclination drives him, or where some immediate profit presents itself. If, then one entertains a worldly wisdom that outcalculates the common precepts of expediency, or if he holds an ethical system that

sets all evil on the edge of external punishment, and puts that punishment far off, the argument against evil which I have been urging may prove practically powerless. It must be admitted that evil courses do succeed; that honesty is not always the best *policy*, although it is always the best *thing*; that sin prospers, and righteousness often loses and fails. Retribution does not always start out conspicuously, as in the case of Athaliah. Suppose, then, that all the instances asserted as to the insecurity of evil could be refuted, would the balance of argument be in favor of evil? No. The signal, everlasting refutation comes, when we discern the real nature of evil. The moral perception of any man upon this point may be tested by this simple question: Suppose Athaliah, instead of being overtaken by that signal punishment, had kept the throne, and died in ripe old age, a crowned and successful sovereign. Would any one really envy Athaliah's career? Would her position have been a desirable one? Would it have been really a success and a blessing? No. The essential evil in her case appears in what the guilty woman was in herself.

Here, then, is the actual point. We must reject evil for what it is in itself; and, in this, all its sophistries are exposed. Surely there is no instance in which a man deliberately elects wickedness for itself alone, and as the final cause of his action.

No man who employs fraud or falsehood maintains that his chief good is in the fraud or falsehood. They are his instruments. Hence, he defends them, or acquiesces in the use of them. Thus he lies and cheats, not for the heartfelt satisfaction of lying and cheating, but for the purposes of a worldly policy. He spins some dishonest scheme, because he thinks this the best way to secure his end. He would just as soon use the morality of the Ten Commandments if he thought the stock was as available. But, agreeably to his experience, falsehood makes the money stick to his fingers a little closer than clean-handed honesty will. And *that* is why he uses falsehood. Or he is intent upon pleasure; and he travels the road of *guilty* pleasure, because he finds the most enjoyment there. Sensual gratification constitutes his ideal of pleasure; and, finding this at the bottom of the wine-cup, *that* is his way. Or he is spurred by ambition. "The surest way," is his motto. Any thing that will make a ladder to climb, although each post is a sham, and every round is a lie. When the people sculpture their demi-gods, who will remember that they were demagogues? . Who will retrace the dirty track by which they gained the pedestal; or, if they do, what will the difference be to him? Thus evil is not relied upon for itself, but for what comes by the use of it.

But now here arises the consideration that evil does become an end, remains an end, when the object

sought for has failed or vanished. The gains of the unscrupulous seeker may crumble, his pleasure may taste upon his lips like the lees of dead wine, and in the end of his ambition he may find only the arrows of calumny or the scoffings of popular change. But the evil itself does not desert him. The agent which he has cherished and used — the falsehood and the baseness — stick and abide in his soul, which he may have forgotten, but upon which at some time he must fall back. There, within, — in the elements of his own personality, — what meanness and accusation, what woe and ruin ! All the capital that the guilty man possesses is this perishable stuff without, and within a world whose dark recesses he dares not fathom, in which lurk ugly memories and fearful thoughts, and where conscience rolls its low, deep thunder.

When the Jewish queen, stained with the blood of her grandchildren, lost the throne she had waded through so much slaughter to obtain, do we say that “all was lost” ? No ; all was not lost. There still remained the blackness and the infamy of her own soul. But would any amount of success have made her action really better ? Would it have made it a desirable achievement ? “The ungodly are like the chaff, which the wind driveth away :” the righteous man is “like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall

prosper." As a sentence of external success or failure, many may doubt or deny this assertion. They may point to the success of the shrewd, the clever, the unscrupulous. But as to the inward state,—the essential, permanent life of the man,—is not this sentence emphatically, sublimely true? The hope and desire of the ungodly, are they not uncertain as the chaff, which the wind bloweth away; while within the dark, scarred threshing-floor remains? But the good man, does he really fail? The righteous cause, does it not really succeed? "We are not sure of it," you may say. "Evidently it does not, and will not succeed in your time or in mine." But it will succeed. Righteousness does not rest upon extrinsic conditions. The sanction of righteousness *is* righteousness; the blessing of goodness *is* goodness. These are truths to carry into the endeavors, the struggles, the thick temptations, of the world. "He who is in Christ Jesus is dead to sin." That is the normal state. He who lives truly strives to be good because God is good; that is the foundation reason for honesty and justice and purity and love. To do evil is to wither and perish in soul. To do good is to expand in nobler and larger life. The ultimate blessing is not in getting, or even in doing, but in being. And he who nourishes in himself this intrinsic element of goodness stands as the rightful heir to a real life in the universe. That is the sceptre in the loyal will, the

crown in the true soul, not like Athaliah's diadem spotted with blood. That is the triumph of the spirit of Jesus. It is exaltation like that of God's own throne.

IX.

THE UNSATISFIED EYE.

“The eye is not satisfied with seeing,” — ECCL. i. 8.

THIS fact is selected as an instance of man's profitless curiosity, as a symbol of the insatiableness of the human mind. The writer of these words beholds all things moving in wearisome and ineffectual labor, — aiming at an end that is never reached ; man and the world around him ; the winds that keep wheeling in their circuit ; the streams that are perpetually running into the sea ; the sea that is never full ; the eye that is not satisfied with seeing ; the ear that is not filled with hearing.

Upon this conclusion of the preacher's argument I do not propose to dwell. But I call your attention to a few suggestions which grow out of the fact here set forth, — the fact that, to whatever result, “the eye is *not* satisfied with seeing,” and perpetually craves new objects.

My remarks will, I think, prove applicable to two cases, — to the dreary doctrine that man is virtually nothing, and all his efforts are unavailing ; and also

to the Christian's affirmation, that there is something better and more lasting than the objects of our sensuous vision.

I. In the first place, then, I direct your attention to the thing itself which in the text is said not to be satisfied with seeing. I direct your attention to the human eye. The grandest revelations of life and nature are infolded in the most familiar facts. He who has found no lofty suggestion in traversing the entire firmament, may yet gain something in studying this wonderful instrument of sight. Consider what instances of skill we gaze at with admiration, and cross oceans to behold, and yet how imperfect and clumsy they are compared with this little compact organ set in its bony cup, with its lenses and regulators and pulleys and screws, its curtaining iris and its crystal deep, its inner chamber of imagery on which are flung the pictures of the universe, — the aspects of nature, the shapes of art, the symbols of knowledge, the faces of love ; this magic glass, both telescope and microscope, filled with the splendors of an insect's wing, yet taking in the scenery of heaven ; this sentinel of the passions ; this signal of the conscious soul, kindled by a light within more glorious than the light without, and never satisfied with seeing.

Such is the human eye. And from the lowest creatures, whose visual apparatus is a mere nervous speck, up to the most complex organisms, there is

nothing that has the range of *this* organ. In certain specialties of vision man may not be equal to some animals or insects. The shark and the spider, the hawk and the cat, may see better on some particular plane of sight; but in that general power which far transcends any special capacity, in scope, in possibility, in educated faculty, in expressiveness, the human eye excels all others.

If, then, superior *qualifications* are to be taken as proof of superior *purpose*, this fact of itself is significant as to the dignity and the destiny of man. We need no better refutation of sceptical theories, no other attestation of sublime hopes, than this crystal globe of vision,—the astronomer's eye, for instance, wandering over the remotest fields of light; the artist's eye, catching the subtle beauty of nature; the eye of love and devotion, recognizing the presence and the touch of the all-pervading spirit.

But in this line of argument nothing seems more suggestive than the very statement of the text: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing." Now, so far as we can judge, the merely animal eye *is* satisfied with seeing. The brute does not shift about to get better views of nature. He does not search the landscape for objects of beauty and sublimity. The ox grazes contentedly in his pasture, and seeks nothing beyond the promise of his food. In darkness, says the Psalmist, "all the beasts of the forest do creep forth," roaring "after their prey," and "seeking

their meat from God." But when "the sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens." It is man only who "goes forth unto his work and to his labor until the evening." It is man only who finds in the opportunities of vision the inspiration of action, and in all that lies under the sun secures employment for a restless curiosity. He ponders unfathomable problems in the pebble and the weed, and eagerly searches the secrets of the universe. How much of human enterprise is simply the result of a longing for vision,—the desire to see strange lands, and look upon memorable faces, to watch the evolution of facts, and detect hidden causes! No man is satisfied with that which he sees right around him. The child longs to know what lies beyond the hills that bound his familiar valley, into what strange country the sun goes down, and upon what marvellous region the rainbow rests. The school-boy quits playing with the pebbles and the surf, to wonder about other shores across the wide, gray sea, and gazes wistfully at the gilded sails away out on the horizon. And here, as in other things, "The child is father to the man." Ever straining beyond the visible limit, ever exploring some depth or height, "the eye is not satisfied with seeing." In the healthy working of the faculties, it is never weary of the opening day, never indifferent to the promise of something new. Doubtless there are nobler motives than curiosity leading men to the ends of the earth.

But how much heroism and achievement does that single passion of curiosity itself inspire! In its gratification, over what a grand scale of diversities, making up the world-wide harmony, does the eye of man sweep, until the earth lies unrolled in the traveller's memory, like a sheet of choral music. From the West to the East, whatever the sun reveals as it flashes upon the rim of the wheeling earth; from the south to the north, where the sun burns above the horizon for one long summer's day, where it hides in the darkness of polar night; wherever the white wake of ships encircles the globe like a chain; wherever man's foot may cling, or his hand may hold from the depths of primeval darkness and the heat of central fire, away above the path of the eagle, where the voice grows faint in the thin upper air,—so does the grand panorama unroll itself before the unsatisfied eye,—tracts of brown desert and intervals of rolling green, snow-capped mountains at whose feet lie billows of yellow corn and purple grapes, clots of teeming cities as motley as their men, spots of unprofaned grandeur almost holy in their solitude,—the poles and antipodes, the burning cone of Cotopaxi and the monotony of Arabian sands.

The eye, however, is not satisfied with its own natural limits, but seeks the aid of instruments. As, in its aspects, it is the most striking of all the organs of sense, so does it transcend them all in its

scope, both of space and time. This little orb of observation, turning on its minute axis, sweeps the splendid theatre of suns and systems, comprehending millions of miles in a glance, and visited by rays of light that have been travelling downwards for thousands of years.

Now, all this statement would be only wearisome and profitless, were it not for the suggestive fact which it involves, and which, when we duly consider it, comes to us with quickening force,—the fact that this insatiable curiosity is characteristic of man alone, and that so much of his time and his effort should be devoted to the mere purpose of *seeing*. Whether the upshot be all vanity and vexation of spirit, or whether it lead to substantial results, the fact itself is none the less suggestive, and draws us into a train of important reflection.

II. For now let me ask, *What* is it that is not satisfied with seeing? In no scale of created being,—not even the lowest,—is it the eye itself that sees. It is the *instinct*, or *consciousness*, back of the eye. Examine the dead organ in man or animal, and all its wondrous mechanism is there. Lift the fallen lid, and the light of the outward world flickers upon its surface. But the *faculty* of sight is not there. The power that back of retina and optic nerve, and far within the mysterious chamber of the brain, actually saw and apprehended the visible forms of things,—*this* has vanished. Whatever that faculty may be

in the brute, we have seen that in man it is a peculiar and distinctive faculty. We have seen that to him belongs this desire for vision,—this pushing inquisitiveness that is never satisfied. Such, then, must be the inner and conscious nature of man. Such must be the mysterious power behind the eye,—the thing that really *sees*. Therefore the eye that is not satisfied with seeing is the *spirit* within us. The outer organ is only its factor, or representative. The mind of man is the eye of man. And here opens an argument that rebukes materialistic disparagement and confirms Christian hope. It is because of the limitless nature of the human soul, that the eye of man never rests, but perpetually wanders over all the visible world, over all the regions of possible truth and beauty. Surely, if this were merely a mortal and limited nature, this would not be. Man would be satisfied with seeing, even as the brute, adjusted to his only sphere, is satisfied with seeing; and he would be content with the scope of the visible and the present. The fact that he is not thus content suggests that for him there is something more than the visible and the present,—a higher than any mere earthly destiny,—a nobler than any mere animal function.

In the first place, consider what it is that the physical eye itself *implies*. I would not urge any presumptuous theory of final causes. I would not attempt to decide what any one thing is absolutely

made for, nor overlook its relations to all other things as part of a grand and complex whole. But an examination of this mechanism alone,—these cups, these tissues, these muscles, these elastic veils—shows at least that the eye is adjusted to the conditions of the external world, and that there are external things for it to behold. So much, I repeat, the physical eye implies. But, this being so, I ask, What is implied by that *consciousness* which acts behind the physical organ,—that faculty which really sees, and is never satisfied? I have said that the mind of man is the eye of man; and I ask, What does that restless mind itself, with its capacities and instincts, imply? Surely it implies the existence of objects fitted to those capacities and instincts,—the existence of unlimited truth and beauty and goodness, and a field of deathless activity for that faculty which is never satisfied. In this peculiarity of man,—in this mounting restlessness and boundless desire,—I trace a power which, though it may often be prompted by a vain curiosity, and seek trivial gratifications, nevertheless bears the stamp of an irrepressible quality and endless life.

For now that we have arrived at the fact that it is really the mind that sees,—the mind itself that is the unsatisfied eye,—we find that not only is it unsatisfied with any limit to its material vision, but it is not satisfied with the mere *forms* of things.

Back of iris and retina there are other lenses. There is a lens of *instinct*, a lens of *reason*, a lens of *faith*, through which come reflections far beyond the visible veil of earth and heaven, images of ideal majesty and loveliness, and "a light that never was on land or sea." Are these mere fantasies engendered from within? If so, I ask, What do these interior lenses imply? And why do they exist at all? In the dead organ, even as it lies useless in the socket, we find demonstration of a visual *purpose*. We infer real objects without, to which it was made to correspond, or, at least, to which it has been adjusted. What, then, must we infer from this mechanism of spiritual consciousness, — the faculty that really *sees*, — when we find it adapted to spiritual realities? What *can* we infer, but that in the wide realm of actual being there are spiritual objects which answer to its function? For the mind, and not the body, being the real eye, the faculty of looking out upon material forms is only *one* of its functions. This faith-vision, this preception of reason, is just as truly an original faculty, although now its objects may be seen only as "through a glass darkly." In fact, with the physical eye we never do see things, — only the reflection of things. You never really saw the most familiar object. You never gazed upon your mother's face, or the expression of your child. We have only portraits of the dearest friends hung in the marvellous gallery of the eye. Yet we do not

distrust these transmitted images. We live in their light, and rejoice in their communion. Why, then, distrust these *other* conceptions, though they are but images also, and we may behold them only in that transparent world where the material lens shall be shattered, and we shall see as we never do here, — “face to face”? Why suppose *these* to be fantasies, any more than the mountains, the stars, the cataract with its awful beauty, the familiar form, the dear countenance with its enduring look of love? This apprehension of God as an inscrutable Essence, yet also a veritable Presence; this impression on the retina of the soul of those who have vanished from our material sight, but who still look upon us across the river of death; this picture-gallery of beloved ones, of all saints crowned with immortal palms, that enriches the chambers of the humblest mind, — are these but mists of fancy, or dreams of mortal sleep? I answer that they are as legitimate as any transcript of the outward world, only more indefinite, as all facts involved with the infinite and the immortal necessarily must be. They are revealed to the same eye as that which sees through the physical organ; their outlines lie as steadily and as undeniably upon its retina as do the outlines of material things. There are diseased eyes, and there are defective eyes, by which the optic nerve brings false reports, upon which the outward world looks grim and obscure, to which all external things are a blank. So, too,

there may be diseased and defective souls, whose images of spiritual things are fantastic and exaggerated, or whose vision is sealed altogether by sad, interior blindness. But these do not impeach the legitimate function of the eye, nor refute the general convictions of men. And these conceptions of God and immortality do not belong to the category of personal conceits. In one form or another their outlines stand pictured on the common soul of man, — the soul of the child, the savage, the saint, the philosopher.

This is not a fanciful analogy, — a play upon words. It is an argument. I maintain that these other lenses of the mind — which is the faculty that really sees — imply corresponding objects as veritably as the mechanism of the physical eye implies corresponding objects. I maintain that these images that hang upon the retina of the soul are as surely the reflections of realities as those which linger on the tissues of the material organ; in fine, that as the mind is not satisfied with seeing the mere material form of things, but seeks and discerns something behind and above them all, it follows that such a transcendent region actually exists.

Moreover, as this faculty of vision that permits no limit to its material discoveries, and looks beyond these sensuous veils, is never satisfied with seeing, I ask, What does this fact itself imply? Surely it suggests boundless opportunities of action. The desire

to see is never quenched: nevertheless the mere physical organ of sight grows weary, and gladly retreats under its drowsy lids. The dew of sleep is required for its refreshment, and the periods of darkness indicate a necessary suspension of its work. Age draws over it a filmy curtain. "They that look out of the windows are darkened," says the author of the text, describing in an impressive figure that season when man's citizenship in this lower world draws to a close, and he is to be released from his labor among visible things. And so comes Death, shutting up the worn-out casements, and bringing on the final night when all this curious mechanism is resolved into its elements. But the *actual* eye is not yet satisfied with seeing, and the forces that shatter its material instruments do not quench its capacity or its yearning. But no capacity is without its sphere, no instinct is forever balked. The unsatisfied eye demonstrates the deathless and ever-unfolding mind.

Thus whatever inference of unprofitable thought, or vain curiosity, the preacher in the Book of Ecclesiastes, or any other man, may draw from the fact that "the eye is not satisfied with seeing," *this* inference also grows out of it, that it supports the loftiest truths of religion concerning human destiny and unseen things.

III. One point remains to be considered. I have illustrated a general condition of humanity. Upon this I have endeavored to construct an argument as to

human dignity and destiny. No man is satisfied with seeing. All men manifest this unlimited desire. But certainly all men do not manifest this in the same degree. With some it is faint and fitful. Therefore in perfect consistency with what has been said, I also urge this truth, — that the eye sees more and more, and more and more shows its capacity for seeing, in proportion as it becomes accustomed to worthy objects. There may be diversities of spiritual, as there are diversities of physical faculty. Consider what some men will train their natural eyes to behold, — the sailor at the masthead, the Indian in the woods, the Esquimaux among the snows. The visual faculty of every man may not be capable of such refinement, and yet the eye of any man may be trained to greater skill. And so there are diversities of spiritual sight, some of them perhaps resulting from original differences in power. But the spiritual vision of any man may be educated to still better results. Some men hardly see any thing with the interior eye, or, rather, with the interior lens of the eye, which is the mind. Living among scenes of wonder and of beauty, — among the ancient miracles of nature, — to such a man there is nothing but common earth and sky, — a barometer for the weather, or a field for crops.

“ A primrose by the river’s brim,
A yellow primrose is to him,
And nothing more.”

But to the eyes of another it is much more, and every thing exhibits something else than its material expression or worldly use. Each opening morning comes like new-born life, "trailing glory" from the Creator's hand. One reason why men have not this spiritual discernment is because they will not see, because they neglect the faculty of seeing. It has been truly said that "the eye sees only that which it brings the power to see." It does not *create* the thing to be seen, any more than the microscope creates the pomp of an insect's wing, or Rosse's tube the splendors of Orion. But we see just what we exercise the power to see; and no external revelations, however urged upon us, will make up for the lack of spiritual refinement. If you would see more things and better things, educate the eye. Educate the physical eye if you would see more of the natural world. But, even then, the *mind* must be educated, if we would discern the glory and the beauty everywhere, and live in a world of perpetual delight, detecting a rarer loveliness in the daisy, and pictures of wondrous grandeur in the shadows that drift along the mountain. It is not merely far travelling that enlarges and enriches the vision. Humboldt may have seen no more than a thousand other men who have been roving over the earth; but he saw better. The observant philosopher discovers a world of wonders in "a tour around his garden." All this tends to the point, that the eye of the soul be edu-

cated, — the interior faculty which in reality does all the seeing. Let the eye of the soul be educated if you would see the world in new relations, if you would detect the true significance of life, if you would discern the real blessedness of every joy and the right look of every affliction, if you would stand consciously in the presence of God, and gaze upon spiritual things. Then you will see these realities where they are, nor wait for the opening of the crystal gates to discern what mere material vision can *never* behold.

It is an old truth, but as true as it is old, that “none are so blind as they who won’t see.” What we really need is not more things but better eyesight. And is it not this eye of the soul that we must mainly rely upon? How far will physical sight guide us? How long will it last us? How much will it enable us to see? At best it gives us only appearances, and itself fades and grows dim ere long. Think, then, of the desolation of those who have no interior vision. How light, comparatively, has been the affliction of physical blindness to men like Niebuhr, who, when the veil had fallen upon present things, could cheer the darkness of his closing years by retracing in the luminous track of memory the scenes of early travel; or to Milton, who, “with that inner eye which no calamity could darken,” saw “those ethereal virtues flinging down on the jasper pavement their crowns of amaranth and gold.” But

“if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” In fact, a man’s spiritual state may be tested by what he sees, by the way in which the world, and the things that are in the world, look to him. Men saw no comeliness in Jesus: they discerned not the aspect of divine truth, because they themselves “were not of the truth.” Pray, then, for light, as of old those blind men by the wayside prayed, “Lord, that our eyes may be opened!”

God has placed us in this world to see. Glorious are the revelations of material things to the material eye; but far more glorious are the revelations made to the eye within. And yet, within the limitations of our present state, even these are not enough for us. Is it not a very suggestive fact? Trained by Him to discern all this excellence, the eye is not satisfied with seeing. It is meant that it never shall be satisfied, here and now. The eye, by this very communion with spiritual objects, is educated to a larger capacity and a nobler desire; and so passes onward, unsatisfied still, beyond the veil, to see more and more of the perfection of God, but, never satisfied with seeing, to push its perception still onward and upward, while the point of present attainment will ever be the signal of new possibility and perpetual aspiration.

X.

THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION.

"Who is the image of the invisible God." — COL. i. 15.

I BEGIN this discourse with the general proposition, that man is conscious of, or at least that he *apprehends*, something beyond what we call nature, — something beyond this order of visible and material things. No facts of the external world are more veritable than the facts of the human soul. You are not more certain of what you see than you are of what you feel. This gravitation towards an Unseen Reality is so nearly universal as to warrant the suspicion that the few instances which are regarded as exceptional are exceptional only in appearance. For instance, the statements of travellers who have penetrated the wild continent of Africa are upon this subject almost unanimous. Dr. Livingstone, speaking of the inhabitants of South Africa, says, "There is no necessity for beginning to tell even the most degraded of these people of the existence of a God or of a future state," the facts being universally admitted. Krapf tells us of a

pygmy race, four feet high, who "live in a completely savage state, like the beasts, yet possessing something of an idea of a higher Being, called Yer, to whom, in moments of wretchedness and anxiety, they pray." Even in regard to the tribes of New Holland, whose possession of these supersensual ideas has been denied, a traveller gives an affecting recital, that goes to prove the existence of such ideas. "Walking one day," he says, "into the village of a secluded tribe, an old woman 'came' up, and looked at him with evident signs of agitation and pleasure. After gazing a while anxiously, she said, 'Yes, it is he;' and clasped the stranger in her arms. He learned, by and by, that she looked on him as the fleshly ghost of a lost son."

It is, however, a mistake to regard the primitive man, the aboriginal, savage man, as the authentic type of the complete man. In him the germs of all our higher faculties are sheathed and suppressed; and we have no more reason for asserting that he is not by nature a religious being, because in some cases the apprehension of spiritual things is dim or imperceptible, than we have for refusing him the title of an intellectual being, because in his rude and repressed state we find no faculties for science or for pure reasoning.

But it is not my purpose to multiply proofs of the proposition that man is conscious of, or at least apprehends, relations to unseen things. In the light of

such evidence as readily appears, I assert that he *does* apprehend such relations, whether there are any valid grounds for such apprehension, or not.

The next step, then, is to ask questions: *What* is this unseen power? and what are our relations to it? There may be many in whose minds these questions do not arise sharply and distinctly. There may be many such before me here to-day. For *you* are familiar with the truths of Christianity, and very likely have never been disturbed in your traditional conceptions. You have never known what it is to "*feel* after God," like those of whom Paul spoke. You have never known what it was to look up into the immensities of nature, unlighted by that glory of the Lord which has shone around the march of humanity ever since Christ came. But I ask you to throw yourselves back into the condition of the world as it lay in heathen sensuality, and philosophical uncertainty, and Jewish limitation, before Christ came. Consider the opinions, the customs, the yearnings, of humanity then, and contrast with that condition the faith, the assurance, the *grasp*, which the soul now has of its God and its Father, and you may in some degree appreciate the significance of "the image of the invisible God."

Yes, strip off a little difference of drapery, and there, nineteen hundred years ago, throbbing under the mystery of life, is the same human heart. There is the soul of man, groping, stumbling, swept with

passions, besieged by temptations, seized and hurried along by inevitable powers, concerning which it knows nothing. There are love in the vacant chamber, and death upon the threshold, and time gathering its trophies in the track of vanishing years, and the loom of destiny weaving its alternations; while around all, constellations rise and dip, and the cold stars shine, and nature, with its mechanism of relentless forces, to all these yearning spirits gives no sign.

And let me add, that, so far as the possibilities of the human intellect are concerned, I see no ground for supposing, that, if Christ had not made his revelation, we should not be essentially in the same condition as those men and women of the ancient time.

And even now, if we will shake ourselves clear of routine, and look into the naked convictions of our own minds, we may realize the forcibleness of that great question, "*What* is that Power behind nature, and what are my relations to it?" And I feel quite sure, that, after we have searched and pondered, we shall find no satisfactory solution of that problem, except the solution indicated in the text. I feel sure of this, because no solution was found until Christ came. Even the Jew had not a complete answer to this question. He had the Law, but did not recognize the Spirit broader and deeper than the Law. He discerned the God of holiness, but not the universal Father. Or, if to him were given these wider and deeper intimations,

at least this line of revelation was confined to a race. Philosophy had not discovered a full answer to the question which I have indicated. It confessed that it is "a difficult thing to find the true God." Of course, I do not disparage the grounds of philosophical belief, or the strong basis of argument that exists in our moral consciousness and in necessary ideas. Nevertheless, I do not know that the human mind has had any contributions, since far earlier times, so as to render it able of itself to give a satisfactory answer to the question, "*What* is the Power behind nature to which the soul bears witness, and what are man's relations to it?" The human mind, during the past few centuries, has achieved much. Yet its most signal triumphs have not been in the direction of spiritual discoveries, but of physical facts. And what aid has science afforded for the solution of this great problem? It has thrown open a vast theatre of being; and by so doing it has rendered our conceptions of the relations between the Infinite and the finite more bewildering. Indeed, it has reduced the apparent importance of man in the great scale of things. It shows us general laws and general ends; but you and I are only *individuals* in this vast mechanism. Our human nature calls for special sympathy and care. We stand among these visible and transient forms with no assurance of any spiritual alliance beyond the veil. We live our brief round of years,

rejoice in our quick-sprung joys, and taste the bitterness of our real sufferings, and go the way of all the generations; and all the while the wheels of nature calmly roll on, their cold splendor flickering alike on the places that know us and the places that know us no more. Now, what is there that answers to this deep need within us? What is there that gives us any satisfactory answer? I reply, Nothing but Christ, — Christ, “who is the image of the invisible God;” Christ, who shows us what God is, and what are his relations to us, inasmuch as he shows us the Father. He fills up this immensity of the unknown with an all-pervading spirit of holiness and love. In the place of laws and forces, he gives us a living Personality.

But conceding that by intellectual effort we can penetrate beyond the veils of the material world, — granting that by spiritual insight we apprehend a spiritual cause, — is not this truth liable to dissolve into a mere abstraction? God everywhere, but at no point touching us with any special sympathy, and, therefore, at no point really grasped by the devout affections of the heart! Now, this personal relation in Jesus Christ checks this tendency to abstraction. It gives us definite anchorage for our faith, and a real person for our love. The religious life of the soul cannot take root in an abstraction. Our hearts can cling only to such an object as Jesus shows us. We can appreciate virtue, moral beauty, goodness,

only as they are realized and expressed in a personal life and action. In fine, we can have a satisfactory revelation of Him who is behind all things, and upon whom all things depend, only in the way which the text declares. I maintain, then, that this is the peculiarity of Christianity. Its central fact was literally an advent, a personal coming into the world. It is a very imperfect notion to regard it as merely a collection of doctrines and precepts. Nor do they give a satisfactory account of Jesus who regard him as only an exemplar or model. He is much more than this. He not only leads us on, but lifts us up. He not only guides, he helps us. He is not only the ideal of humanity, he is "the image of the invisible God."

I proceed to remark, that Jesus is the representative of God in the only way in which it is conceivable that God could be represented to man. Exert your thoughts to the utmost, and you can conceive no other way in which the Invisible, whom no eye hath seen or can see, — the Infinite, which in its essence cannot be comprehended by finite faculties, — you can conceive no other way in which this could be made real to us, — shown, not in his absolute nature, which it is impossible for us to perceive, but in his moral personality, in his relations to man, which is all we need to know, — this could be made real to us in no other way than by that image in Jesus Christ.

When I put these two facts together, then : on the one hand, when I perceive how much man needs a revelation of God, how all round the world he yearns after God ; and then, on the other hand, when I consider what it is that purports to be such a revelation, when I consider that this revelation comes just in the shape that is wanted, comes as an "image of the invisible God," in such an one as Jesus of Nazareth, — I feel assured that we hold to no falsehood, to no mere myth, but to a solid truth.

But Christ standing before us as "the image of the invisible God," at once lifts us into the region of spiritual facts, and makes the unseen real. As a practical application of my theme, therefore, I proceed to observe, that from this point we draw the interpretation of three things.

I. Life.

II. The human soul.

III. Providence.

I. As "the image of the invisible God," — as one who has made the unseen real, — Christ gives us a true interpretation of life. He not only teaches, but he shows us, that "the life is more than meat." Need I say how vividly this truth is impressed upon us when we behold all the relations of our existence *visibly* drawn into connection with their divine source? Unaided by this revelation, the human mind

spins its inferences from vague though undeniable instincts, and from the objects of the material world. I do not seek to exalt Christianity by disparaging reason. As well seek to glorify the range of telescopic vision by disparaging the powers of the human eye. And, as an intimation of the divine source and the high destiny of the human mind, let us accept not only the conclusions which it has successfully wrought out, but the very problems with which it has grappled. Let us measure its greatness, not merely by what it has done, but by what it has tried to do. Could any mere creature of earth and chance even suggest such problems, or attempt to explore them? The reasonings and the inquiries of man in all ages are splendid hints of his origin and his birth-right. They are steps which, though resting upon the earth, and veiled at the top, nevertheless point upward. It seems a cogent answer to any sceptical sneer at human speculation, to say that man has ever speculated at all, or yearned for knowledge of those high and hidden things.

Surely one who was a mere creature of earth and sense would be content to graze and perish. And yet what a flood of light breaks upon these strange passages of human life, when in the clearness of a personal revelation we see who and what he is with whom we have to do! For what is that expression of the invisible God which is reflected upon us, children of humanity, in our conflict and sorrow and

sin, from the face of Jesus Christ? It is an expression of infinite love, assuring us of our relation to one who carries us and all souls in his compassion and his care. In distant lands, amidst strange scenes of camp or desert, the wanderer, oppressed with loneliness, may conceive that he is forgotten in his far-off home, and may find even in his own consciousness that the bonds of kinship have been melted into abstractions by space and time. But, when he takes out the portrait of a father's or a mother's face, it revives the magic vision of the heart, and makes those absent ones near and fresh again. So in life's exile seasons, its dreary scenes, its camp-fire hours of watch and peril, the heart of man is strengthened and his soul assured by the image of the Father's face in Jesus Christ. And if by this we may interpret special instances and conditions of our individual experience, so may we interpret life itself. Its transitory forms and shifting processes are revealed in their eternal relations, and we discern their purpose, and are drawn into communion with Him who fills and orders all things.

II. As "the image of the invisible God," Christ convinces us of the reality of the human soul. Man is prone to ally himself with things of time and sense, until practically these become every thing. At length he asks, "What is the soul? I see nothing but a body: I know only a bodily life. I find no soul by the crucible or the battery. I detect no such

thing under the microscope. How does the soul exist? What is its witness?" Or, if he does not ask such questions theoretically, he practically suggests them.

Now, the soul *does* bear witness to itself, — it bears witness, so to speak, by its own motions. Those realities which most truly constitute a man's own self — invisible thoughts and affections — are made manifest in visible expressions. Through lips of clay speaks a parent's love, through eyes of flesh look hope and fortitude, through fingers of bone and sinew thought works out its grand devices. And the *works* of the soul plead for it. The creation of genius endures, — the beauty which is immortal in the marble or on the canvas; the truth which stands on the printed page, and which goes forth as a word of consolation and of power, as an inspiring impulse, as a trumpet-call, from generation to generation. But the creative genius itself, was that mere flesh and blood? Has that decayed with the perished frame? Is that now all dust and ashes? Or, being itself immortal and unfailing, does it still live, like the beauty, the truth, with which it travailed and which it expressed? What do I say, — the beauty immortal on the canvas and in the marble? The truth standing forever on the printed page? Yes, the beauty immortal, the truth enduring; but not the marble, not the canvas, not the book. These

shall perish, and the special elements which they enshrined will find new forms of expression. Surely, then, so shall the soul which consorted with these find new forms of expression, even though its material vehicle crumbles away.

But too often these witnesses of the soul are not heeded, and the soul itself does not comprehend its own witness. Christ makes the fact real to us, "the image of the invisible God:" he awakens within us a consciousness of alliance with Himself and with the Father, so that whoever believes in him *knows* that he shall not perish. To such an one, immortality is a present inheritance. He feels that his soul is worth more than all the outward world. Therefore he will not sell it for all the world can give. He will not deny it for all that the world can take away. He will not bury it in worldly cares, nor suffer it to corrode with worldly uses. He will cherish its divine alliance. He will strive that it may be sustained in the atmosphere of its true life.

III. As "the image of the invisible God," Christ gives us the key to a providential plan in things. Events in this world are involved with invisible relations. Unseen ends, unseen uses, ordained by One who is unchanging and eternal,—such is the right conception of the conditions among which we are placed. Events trouble us because their entire scope is not within the limits of our vision. Thus death is a mystery when we look only to visible

things. This resolving into dust of warm and living tissues; this crumbling away of thought, affection, life; this vanishing of those whom we know and love into voiceless darkness; this cataract of generations pouring over the precipice of time, — pondering upon this merely with the eye of sense, what does it all mean? It is only when we look with different vision, — a vision of that realm which heretofore has been invisible, — that we find the explanation.

And here, too, is the fact of sorrow. Why should this be the special burden of human hearts, the inevitable shadow that accompanies human bliss? Why should it be while the physical world is so beautiful and joyous? Such splendor in sunshine and moonlight, such a glory upon the hills, such delight even in the more awful forms of nature! And surely in the more defined circle of animal consciousness, there appears no such struggle with destiny, no such depth and boundlessness of agony, as in the experience of man. Why, then, such a peculiar burden laid upon the human heart? To this question no answer comes from things apparent. From the invisible world alone that answer comes. A grander field of action beyond the vale, O heroic soul! for which here your powers are tried and prepared. Spiritual results, O sufferer, baptized with dews of mighty agony! in *them* shall be revealed the glorious blossoms which now lie folded in your crown of

thorns. Realities beyond, O smitten mother! in your tearful blindness vainly reaching forth for that which has forever left its pressure on your bosom, — realities beyond, where affection shall no longer “see through a glass darkly,” — and children’s voices are singing in the choir of heaven. He who deals with us is invisible, and works for unseen ends.

And thus we are led out into broader contemplations of a providential plan encircling the world, and sweeping through all transactions. Not visible agents, but the invisible Providence, really precipitates events, and controls them. Whatever the issues of the hour, confront them boldly. Do not confound an argument with a fear, nor think with human breath to stop the revolution of the globe. God makes history, and he keeps making it. Broader ends than American history, or European history, or Oriental history, or the history of any single place or time, are comprehended in that perpetual, overruling movement, — ends and uses that are invisible. There is no ripe and quiet time. No question is *settled*. Change, postponement, defeat, sacrifice, — these are the laws. Furrows for the seed. The iron ploughshare before the harvest. Discipline, loss, martyrdom, in the present; all, doubtless, for some nobler future; but that, ah! *that*, is in the counsels of the invisible God.

Yet surely there would be little consolation if we possessed nothing but the conviction of an invisible

Providence in public or private affairs. How much would our mere guesses help us in regard to the general welfare or our own? By the light of his own wisdom, who can tell us *what* this invisible Providence is? Or what aid do we get from science? Well, it gives us a scale to measure by,—a concrete method to help our intellectual conceptions. Geology, for instance, reveals a vast *plan* in the natural world, unfolding through ages, and thus may suggest the analogy of a plan in human affairs. It lends us a sort of time-measure, when we are disposed to cry out, “O Lord! how long?” Astronomy, also, illustrates the fact of illimitable relations, and forbids our confounding a part with the whole.

But how do we know that there is any Providence at all? Or are we sure that this unseen power is not a disguised malignity, or a blind fate? And who shall convince us that our reasoning is any thing more than the expression of a need, a fond desire, rather than the certification of a great reality?

Evidently these visible things, regarded by themselves, at times might discourage and appal us. And men who look to these things alone do get discouraged and frightened, and then, either in Epicurean indifference, or atheistic despondence, cry out, “All is at loose ends!” My hearers, we must have some revelation of this unseen Providence. It must come down among these conditions which we do see, and show us the supreme Good-will which controls

the affairs of the world at large, but which also cares for you and me. We *have* such a revelation. Once amidst this scenery of time and change, Christ has appeared, — “the image of the invisible God,” — and thus gives us the key to Providence and the providential plan.

I need not dwell longer upon illustrations. Let your own thoughts, your own experience, indicate them. In closing, then, I simply ask, Have you ever considered this peculiarity of Christianity? Have you ever pondered the meaning of this declaration concerning Jesus, that he “is the image of the invisible God”?

XI.

SAMSON.

"And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life." — JUDGES xvi. 30.

I CALL your attention at this time to some suggestions growing out of the life and achievements of Samson. I shall speak of him as he appears in two aspects. First, as a providential man; that is, a man notably working in the line of providential intention. And, in the second place, I shall consider him inside this wide sphere of historical movement, as a form of individual character illustrating traits which in some sense are common to us all.

I. It appears to me that Samson, although an imperfect character, and in some respects a weak one, stands related to the divine economy at large precisely as he stands related to the general scheme of divine truth within the lids of the Bible. It may hardly be necessary for me to say, that because an instance is recorded in the Book of Numbers, or in

the Book of Judges, it is not, therefore, necessarily a divine instance. Every man is not a perfect man because he enters upon the scene of revelation, even when he helps to carry out, and we may say has a "mission" to help carry out, the purposes of that revelation. I repeat, it may hardly be necessary to say this; and yet many people apparently regard Scripture history as isolated and exceptional ground, where every transaction is supernatural, and every believer in God is sacred. Therefore, any flaw in the character of such personages is regarded as a flaw in the entire Bible. Apparently, by some, it is considered a damaging argument against the claims of revelation to show that Jacob was guilty of fraud, and David of grosser sin. But, in fact, this only illustrates the peculiarity of Scripture history, which does not present a collection of isolated transactions, or an array of exceptional men. As Palestine is a part of our common earth with England and France,—as the same general atmosphere envelops the woods of America and the cedars of Lebanon,—so the men of the Bible exhibit our common nature, and show their human side, notwithstanding its contact with the divine. It is not an exceptional world, or an exceptional humanity, that is displayed there; only there is more strikingly made manifest the implication of Providence with men and with events. It is not God's ideal of man that is presented in the Bible, but the gradual unfolding of man's ideal of God.

Therefore, although the children of Israel were chosen to be depositaries of God's truth, it does not follow that the people themselves were immaculate. The record shows that they were far otherwise. And when, here and there, some personage arises to lead on the destinies of the people, and with these the world-wide destinies committed to their charge, shall we be surprised because, at the same time, he is a fallible and even a barbarous person, bearing the stamp of a rude age?

But whoever studies the record will, I think, be impelled to concede this, that however rude the events, and however imperfect the men, among these and through these flows a divine revelation like a gulf-stream, palpable in truths the most profound, in sentiments the most devout, that kindle the minds and nourish the hearts of men in all ages. There stand the indisputable results in history. From the oblivion of twenty-five hundred years, Assyria lifts its winged lions and human-headed bulls. Still among the sands stand Egypt's mystic temples, showing in shapes of ape and ibis what Egypt worshipped as its gods. In forms of glorious sculpture Greece preserves her conceptions of natural beauty. And now, among these monuments, old as the oldest, stands this monument of the Hebrew Bible; illustrating not a visible but an invisible God, not with painted hieroglyphics, or strange conceits in stone, not with cold and lifeless marble, but with unchan-

ging truths, in living words, that at this very hour awaken the sublimest conceptions of spiritual realities, and work in the most forward movements of our time. So ineradicably have these conceptions been wrought into the nature of one people, that in those revolutions which have blown sand-drifts over great empires, and whirled this very people across the earth, they still remain, among all the tribes of men, distinct and peculiar. By virtue of these Bible truths so long and sacredly cherished, they are the great educators of our race. Yes, with all its imperfect characters, with all its incongruous events, here still is the Bible, unfolding these conceptions of God, of duty, of eternal verities, made known so many ages ago, yet challenging our admiration, our conviction, and the test of our largest culture. It unrolls its wondrous history; shows us individuals rude and fallible; shows us an ungrateful nation, often lapsing into idolatry, marked by varying grades of civilization, yet influenced by ideas far more pure and sublime than those which swayed the minds of other men, and ever as they sink into false worship by some strange impulse heaved clear above it again, and brought back to the service of the one God. Observe, it is no idol, no graven image, like those of the nations around him, to which, in all his degradation, blind and staggering Samson lifts his prayer, but to the Unseen and the Eternal; and in this lonely act of devotion he rises

far above the mocking rabble who rejoice in his downfall and his shame. Turn to the very first leaf of this book: there stands that sublime declaration which the human mind cannot overleap, that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Compare this account of the creation with all other cosmogonies, and see if it is not the only account that is at all adequate, the only account that is not intrinsically absurd. There are the Ten Commandments, the moral sentiment of which the most enlightened souls confess, and will to the latest time obey. There is that wonderful literature. There are those passages in Job, those outbursts of prophetic splendor, those psalms in which the loftiest and tenderest conceptions of God find expression, and where the profoundest emotions of the human heart speak in penitence and trust, in gladness and supplication, in exultation and wailing.

Whatever, then, may be the character of the transactions or of the men recorded in the Bible, it exhibits a divine element; it unfolds a revelation of God by which a peculiar race is educated for the benefit of the whole world. They are *educated*, and therefore they only gradually advance out of ignorance and falsehood. Their errors cling to them, and keep dragging them down; but through all flows the divine current bearing them along, and with them the great plan of Providence.

Furthermore, if we are perplexed because God

permits this thing or that thing, and only at last evidently overrules, let us remember that the Bible is not exclusively burdened with such perplexities. For so it is in the entire scheme of things. In the universe at large, God permits many things, and only at last evidently overrules. But it relieves no dilemma,—at least, it only breeds other dilemmas,—either in the Bible or in nature, to reject the idea of a divine element because of certain incongruous facts.

And now we may be prepared to accept the conclusion, that if the Bible is to be received as containing a divine revelation, and the Jews are to be regarded as a divinely educated people notwithstanding the tumultuous times of Joshua and the wild and bloody wars of the Judges, so is Samson to be regarded as a providential man,—that is, a man helping forward God's purpose,—although he was a man whose moral standard was not the highest, and whose conduct at times was weak and bad.

I presume that the details of his history are familiar to you. Those who are not much used to the Bible—young men who are living merely for pleasure or for chance, and who are very dubious respecting the contents of the old book; old men who have let the dust settle thickly upon its covers—do nevertheless remember the story of the famous Jewish hero who rent the lion, and slew the Philistines, and carried the gates of Gaza upon his shoulders.

And yet what freshness exhales from this old narrative ! What interest and pathos in those struggles of a fierce heroism,—in that wild tract of history with its rim of miracle and tragedy ! And with those strange transactions of thousands of years ago, blend the love and hatred, and joy and grief, the strength and infirmity, of a real human life, coming close and appealing to our humanity to-day.

I have indicated the way in which I consider Samson to have been a providential man. In a notable manner he helped accomplish the divine purposes in Jewish history, and therefore in all history. The angel who ascended in the flame of Manoah's sacrifice proclaimed that he should "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." This object was effected, as it seems, under the garb of personal feuds and revenges. The entanglements of private affairs involved the threads of national destiny ; and, as it were, the spirit of an entire people was concentrated in the single-handed efforts of one man. A Nazarite from his mother's womb, the superhuman strength of Samson appears to have been implicated with his faithfulness to the vow of which his unshorn hair was a sign and pledge. Possessed of this marvellous power, and acting more or less consciously under influences which impelled him like strokes upon "a drum or cymbal," the position of the territory of Dan, the tribe to which Samson belonged, as the outpost of Israel, impinging upon

the country of the hostile and victorious Philistines, afforded a convenient theatre for his exploits. In marrying a woman of Timnath, he may have been moved by genuine affection, although at the same time consulting national or patriotic objects, while this intimacy finally turned entirely to this latter result. The discordant elements, for a moment bound together by the nuptial tie, soon began to exhibit their mutual repulsion; and Samson found ample occasion for public and for private vengeance. The marriage terminated in treachery and in bloodshed, and a riddle led to slaughter. Betrayed by his own wife, the Jewish hero, in whom there seems to have dwelt a grim humor as well as strength, pays his wager of thirty garments by slaying and stripping thirty Philistines. In the wild war that follows, his weapons are as fantastic as they are effective. He astonishes, torments, and overcomes his enemies with firebrands at the tails of jackals, and with the jawbone of an ass. He smites them hip and thigh. He slays a thousand of them in a single battle. They can neither conquer nor surprise him. Shut up within the walls of Gaza, he rises at midnight, bursts open the gates, and carries them away.

We see, then, that, rallied against the strength of Samson, the endeavors of the Philistines were all in vain. But they achieved a temporary triumph through his infirmity. The weapons of his downfall were his own passions and sinful dalliance. The

prowess that had smitten thousands vanished in Delilah's lap. The formidable foe, bound, blinded, and grinding in a prison, becomes an object of mockery and contempt. But through guilt comes sorrow, through sorrow repentance, and through repentance new strength for sacrifice, for death and victory. In the midst of shame and pitiable helplessness, the captive is inspired to lift that last prayer to God, — "O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." He exclaims, "Let me die with the Philistines;" and then, bowing himself "with all his might, the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein: so the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

Now, in all this, it is easy to see that Samson helped forward the deliverance of the Jewish people, and the designs of Providence. As I have already remarked, this lifelong contention with the Philistines, though apparently the ferment of a private quarrel, was really the action of a national spirit, and the avenging of national wrongs. It is always refreshing to encounter a man who is patriotic from his heart's core to the tips of his nails; in whose loyal pulse throbs every pulse of the nation, not turned by any current of private or party feeling into that inverted patriotism which rejoices in the

nation's defeats, and laments at its victories. And there is always hope for a nation that holds in its bosom even one such man. Even when his country lies with her forehead in the dust, like Israel before the Philistines, here is one artery of regeneration. When the flame of Liberty seems smouldering out, her torch may be kindled again from the spark in a hero's breast. The conduct of Samson must have had its influence in arousing the ancient spirit of his people; and this, carried out far beyond his limitations and defects, into the great current of the divine plan, worked to a glorious deliverance.

Nay, as in his death he slew more than in his life, so the manner of that death may have been more effective to the great ends in view than his own living efforts. The very weakness of the strong man, conducing to his fall, may have led to a greater victory,—to the fame of the hero lending the inspiration of the martyr. Humanity gathers its grandest energies and its final triumphs not from occasions of splendid success, but from the sad memories of great men, and the most mournful tragedies of history. There is no such inspiration in Austerlitz as in Thermopylæ. The fervor of patriotism is kindled quicker by the bloody snows of Valley Forge than by the triumphant cannon of Yorktown. In her slow procession around the world, Liberty bears not laurel-wreaths and flags of victory, but the pale and bleeding effigies of her martyrs. The defeat of every good

cause foretokens its resurrection, as the harvest springs from the buried seed. In the darkest day of a people's career, when its most sacred bulwarks have been overturned by unscrupulous tyrants, we may joyfully anticipate the achievements of desperate freedom, and the rebound of insulted truth.

Nor, in presenting Samson as a providential man, can I help dwelling upon the thought of such a process going on in the wide field of history. It is the glory of natural science to detect the pulse of a majestic movement in all things,—in the drop of dew, and in Saturn's "luminous ring." But it is the achievement of a still nobler science to detect a divine action through ages and nations, through dynasties and revolutions, overruling all policies, never balked by events, but weaving still its own grand results. Whenever an extraordinary character like Samson appears upon the scene, it suggests the truth that "Providence conceals itself in the details of human affairs, but is unveiled in the generalities of history."

And whatever mystery may be involved with this work of Providence; however perplexing it may be to find so much evil in the world, and to behold the wise and good God carrying out his designs through these very processes,—we gain nothing, we lose much, by dismissing the notion of a Providence. For the sin and suffering remain; and then they assume the aspect of chaotic sin and suffering,—sin and suffering

of unlimited possibility. But now this great zodiac of Providence, girdling the world with its mysterious splendor, only convicts us of a short-sightedness that cannot pierce its depths, or comprehend its sweep, while room is left for our faith, and encouragement for our effort. It binds the transactions of history in a glorious unity. It permits us to look beyond the human purpose and the present hour, to a comprehensive and beneficent result, evident in decay as in growth, — sweeping in the fire-storm of Bonaparte's ambition as in the lonely wake of Columbus. It assures us that no tendency will be permitted to run too far. On the one hand, intoxicated with privilege, and lapsing into weakness, the people by and by, like Samson, are seized, bound, and blinded. But again when oppression sits in a haughty supremacy of power, abused and insulted humanity, like Samson grinding in humiliation, grasps the pillars of social order, and the fabric topples down. If any cause is only man's cause, it is weak with human contingencies; but the cause of God, proceeding through generations, surviving individuals, surviving events, is never defeated.

II. In the next place we may consider Samson's life, inside the sphere of historical movement, as affording practical suggestions for us all. 1. In the first place, then, let me say something respecting the wondrous *power* of this Jewish hero of the olden time. Even this quality does not remove him far from

any one of us; for each of us, although he has not that power, has power of some kind, equally with that held in trust from God, and like that depending upon the spirit in which it is held. In the case of Samson this power is said to have lain in his hair. When that was shorn he became weak. But those unshorn locks were only a sign of his consecration as a Nazarite, — of his relation to God, — answered on the other hand by this marvellous physical gift. When in weak compliance he lost the sign, then the thing signified departed from him. But I observe that there is no true strength for any man save in inward rectitude, — in right relations between his own soul and God. And it is surprising to find how much that is called power is, after all, only an empty *symbol* of power, — only the illustration of a possibility. The king, with crown and sceptre, is often only the effigy of a king, — is not himself kingly. And how often is intellectual power nothing more than intellectual facility! — not the intrinsic force or developing life, of a nature devoted to truth, but merely the glitter of accomplishments, or an ostentatious parade of facts. There are men who show off their mental ability as the bully does his muscle, and use their acquisitions as the savage uses his tinsel and his war-paint. Now, power is comparatively worthless, except as consecrated to the highest ends, and held in the sense of accountableness to God. But, when held in this way, any kind of power becomes honor-

able because the man himself is strong. It is a wretched condition when a man is so fond of his money that he has himself, as it were, become transmuted into money. So one may hold his store of facts as a miser holds his gold, for no end beyond themselves, merely as an accumulation. But when science as the handmaid of faith and love conducts Christian philanthropy and moral heroism into wider realms of achievement, and lends them larger means, then it is indeed a power, — but power by virtue of its consecration to the highest ends.

And, with this consecration of such ability as he has, any one is strong, — strong as Samson. A man who has made up his mind to trust in God, and maintain his own convictions of right, let what may come, goes through the world invincible. He rends lions, he slays Philistines; he bursts Gaza-gates, and carries them away.

This was the essential strength of Samson, and it is the especial relation which his personal history bears to each of us. His real power was in his alliance with God through consecrated faithfulness. The physical force was the symbol or indication of that alliance. But intrinsic power, unconquerable power, — whether the external gifts be few or many, brilliant or common, — is in every hand of duty, and in every heart of earnest faith. So much, then, for Samson's strength in its relation to all power in ourselves or in others.

2. But, in the next place, let us consider the lesson of Samson's *infirmity*. It is the lesson of broken allegiance, of mean compliance, — the lesson that so often moves us to exclaim, "Alas for the weakness of strong men, and the littleness of great men!" — the hero conquered not by outward foes, but by his own passions, — most abjectly conquered; not when he was bound and led to prison, nor when he reeled in blindness for the mockery of the Philistines, but when he forfeited his pledge for blandishments, and laid his head in Delilah's lap. In all the history of Samson there is nothing more pathetic and suggestive than the simple assertion, "He wist not that the Lord was departed from him." That is the fact of unconscious degradation, of a priceless possession thoughtlessly cast away; a spectacle how often repeated, a story how often told, in the career of gifted and mighty men! How sad a chapter in a thousand biographies! How terrible a summing-up of "the infirmities of genius;" of great philosophers inveigled by the sophistry of temptation; great poets drowning their laurels in the wine-cup, and swamping the angel in the brute; heroes taken captive by passion, and doing menial service to appetite; statesmen grinding in the mill of party, with their eyes put out, staggering from pillar to post, and making a show for the mockery of the world! A sad spectacle in the case of the invincible Hercules of Israel; a sad spectacle in ten thousand conspicuous

instances; nay, but a sad spectacle in the case of any man who yields to his infirmity, and in the thrall of appetite and sin surrenders the God-delegated power, that is in him; unconscious of his degradation perhaps, until in some shape aroused by the startling fact, "the Philistines be upon you!"

3. Let me call your attention to one more point. Concerning Samson, it has been said that "his life began in marvel, and ended in the deepest tragedy." But, my brethren, is it not so with every human life? Does it not begin in marvel? Is not simple *being* itself a marvellous fact, a wondrous gift? And for what end? Surely for no mean use. It is bestowed that in some way each may do God's work in life; and in his place, and with his possibilities of action, every man is a providential man. And yet how many hold their endowments in subservience to their infirmities!—that young man, for instance, shorn of promise, of principle, nay, even of decency; bearing himself perhaps so loftily, but living so meanly; so boastful in his assumptions, but so contemptible in his conduct; the fragment of a burnt-out soul, a staggering nuisance, an organ of blasphemy, an instrument that might have been of blessing and of honor, now flawed and corrupted, not nearly so useful or effective as the jawbone of an ass. Every life begins in marvel, *is* a marvel: only too often it is not discerned or heeded.

And every life ends in tragedy; not always with

marked externals, not always with conspicuous horror, like that of Samson. Often it is the tragedy of untimely death brought on by gross self-slaughter. We see the strong man totter and fall, borne to his grave with that face so marred and desecrated, which as it were but yesterday smiled with promise in the face of that now desolate mother. There are tragedies unfolding the sorrow of wasted power, of lost confidence, and violated vows; tragedies of domestic life, of heart-broken women, of little children, whose white faces glimmer like judgment-scrolls before the eyes of the self-degraded husband and father; tragedies of discrowned intellect and unsceptred will, seized and bound by rebellious appetites; tragedies of neglected opportunities and disregarded duties; a real "soul's tragedy" reeling blindly out of the world, and pulling down the temple of the body with it.

At least, there is the tragedy with which all men are implicated, the final tragedy of death; the fall of the curtain to a wail of mournful music, hiding in awful shadow the form of one who lies breathless on the field where he has either done well or ill. Grand and brilliant may that life have been, or poor and obscure, but now all is over. Nothing remains but the *influence* that reaches out far beyond it. In this condition this tragedy comes very near to us, and startles us with the question, "Is it not of the deepest interest what this our life shall be?"

In Samson's case there is at last an appearance of repentance, — a turning to the Lord. The glory of prayer lights up the hero's face, with his returning strength, and signs of God's accepting mercy beam upon him as he falls. It is better to anticipate the repentance. It is better for each of us in the conduct of life, — each with his own peculiar power, — to work the achievement to which God calls him ; and, praying for the true hero's strength, pray also for divine help in our infirmities.

XII.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD.

[Preached at the close of the year.]

“Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.” —
PSALM xciii. 2.

THERE are two methods of religious growth, or quickening. One is by looking within, the other is by looking up. The first leads to the scrutiny of our own hearts; the consideration of our sins, our shortcomings, and our moral wants. The second process impels us to turn towards the infinite, — to let our individual concern mingle with the illimitability of the divine being; in one word, to find breathings of consolation and inspirations of duty by meditations upon God.

Into such meditations I propose to lead you upon this last Sunday evening of the year. I take the words of the text as drawing us away from this transient time-scenery to that great reality upon which all things depend, and from which all things proceed. If the universe about us is not a mere whirl of blind forces, then is the declaration before

us the greatest of truths. In the movement of events it assures us of a supreme and steady control: it assures us of permanence in the midst of change, — of a root of absolute being, out of which branches this sheaf of phenomena. In the growth and decay of systems, in the procession of years bearing swiftly onward our joys and our sorrows, tracing the brief furrows of our lives that end in grave-dust, “Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.”

The theme suggested by the text, then, is the eternity of God; and the special use which I wish to make of this theme at the present time is, a consideration of the eternity of God as a standard of human measurement. I say, the theme suggested by the text; for it is only in the way of suggestion that I propose to speak in this discourse. The words before us are *suggestive*. They strike chords of thought and sentiment which cannot easily find expression in speech, but which nevertheless fill us and lift us up.

I. In the first place, then, I call your attention to the vastness and majesty of the truth declared in the text. There is set before us, not the *conception*, — for we cannot conceive it, — but the proclamation, of an eternal order and intelligence; of being without limit, stretching far beyond the possibilities of our thought. And here let me observe that thus we find a practical purpose in those enormous computations which characterize modern science. Apart

from wonder and curiosity, there appears no substantial object in ascertaining how far the sun is from the earth, or Sirius from the sun, or one world from another, or in computing the waves in that sea of time which has been rolling from the creation of the globe until now. But when we take these vast measurements as counters by which, though in the faintest degree, to approximate the idea of God's eternity; when we use them as steps by which to rise towards that height, as lines by which we try to fathom something of that depth; when we think of the universe in its present relations as only a single season in his endless years; when we regard these springing worlds, these ripening firmaments, as the seed which he is perpetually sowing, the sheaves which he is perpetually gathering in; when in these rocky joints and scars we trace the tide-marks of his ceaseless action, the footprints of his forth-going from eternity, — then do we find a special use in these computations. At least, in our attempt to form some conception of God, they serve to steady us. In their degree, they lift us to a higher point of contemplation. As the fine spider's web stretched across the telescopic lens enables us to appreciate the movement of the stars, so, in their turn, do these objects, stretched across the area of our thought, help us to recognize the boundlessness of the Almighty.

And these are our *only* standards of measurement.

They are the only instances by which we can bring home to ourselves the great truth proclaimed in the text. When we say, "His throne is established of old, he is from everlasting," to aid us in apprehending this truth, we can only say, "He is before all worlds and all ages." All their periods are but transient phenomena sailing across the disk of his enduring being. Tax your thought with the reckoning of those ages through which the globe has been ripening to the present hour; yet before all these you find him as he was, is now, and ever shall be. Think of the long processes by which worlds have been formed, and systems brought into their present relations; yet his being includes and immeasurably outruns them all.

How inexpressibly grand, then, is even the statement of this truth, the very thought of this eternity! All things else have their times and seasons; no more the wild flower that opens its leaves for a day, or the insect that spins a glittering lifetime in an hour, than the sea that we call "everlasting," or the systems of the sky. The whole creation changes, moves out of its place, ebbs and flows, and in one form is the counterpart of another. The decree of perishableness is upon London and New York as upon bud and calyx. The pyramid is no more eternal than the ant-hill. The atoms that make up the mountain are crumbling like the clods by the wayside, or like the frame of man. Our own lives are

built out of perished existences. Our enjoyments are legacies. Our hopes blossom out of decay. The earth is an enormous catacomb, with epitaphs engraved by the sea and by fire. Every atom of soil has been vital. Every withered fibre may have been a pulse of sensation, or a conduit of blood. Such is the law of all visible things,—perpetual transmutation, from gas to granite, from the atom in the structure of the zoöphyte to the atom in the brain of Newton. Notice, too, the way-marks of our own experience; the surprise with which we find ourselves old while we yet feel young, and trace gray hairs in the furrows of our passion and our hope; the laugh of youthful glee breaking into a querulous cackle; the boat in which we have sailed along the green and tempting shores suddenly spinning down the Grand Rapids, and the mists and thunder of Niagara not far.

Surely, then, in this constant mutation, it is not only a sublime, it is also a refreshing thought, that there is One who is eternal; that this wheel of transition spins on that immutable axle; and that, amidst these shifting possessions and waning hopes, we can look up and say, “Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting.”

II. Let us, in the next place, regard the truth set forth in the text as a necessity of reason. The words of the Psalmist here are not a mere metaphor: they proclaim a reality. Not only do they strike the

chords of devout sentiment; they answer to the demands of reason: for it is an intellectual necessity, that, beneath all these changing phenomena, there should be a ground of fixed substance. This orderly movement of the universe must have proceeded from design, which implies pre-existent mind. Indeed, the human mind itself, which thus conceives an eternal Mind, testifies to the existence of such a Mind. Of course it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine any actual beginning of the material world: it is difficult to imagine any thing else than that the elements of the things which we see should always have been. But surely it is no less difficult to conceive the beginning of intelligence,—of a mind that plans, creates, and controls.

Moreover, the sphere of physical existence is by no means limited to our human experience. Here are these immense forms, these varieties of the material world, rising from grade to grade, stretching away beyond the compass of our vision, and even of our thought,—enduring for countless ages. I ask, then, can we suppose that this much more wonderful reality of mind is in its manifestation limited to man, and shut up within the cincture of the human brain? As well may we suppose that all the physical energy of the universe is included in the blade of corn that develops through its brief season, or in the flower that opens and falls between the rising and the setting sun. This fine intelligence, this pro-

ductive thought, that kindles in a Galileo and flames in a Shakspeare,—is it a *transient* element? Is it merely a phenomenon? or does it represent a substantial Life, a reservoir of Intelligence, out of which all phenomena spring? Even in its humblest manifestation, is there not enough in this mysterious faculty to convince us that man is not its sole possessor, and to lead us to the assurance of an Eternal Mind?

I look upon the wondrous operations of the human intellect,—that secret depth out of which issue forces that move the world; institutions, laws, achievements, all that appears in human history; all that impels humanity forward in the march of civilization; I enter, as it were, the secret chambers of the poet's vision and the philosopher's thought; I trace that mysterious star-fire, that burr of quenchless light whirling nebulously in the rudest brain, dimly struggling through the darkness of the most degraded soul; I study that marvellous process, the unfolding of a child's thought, every day evolving some new trait, creeping timidly along the surface of knowledge, the outer edge of facts, until its tendrils hold firmly by the universe, and it swings into the wide realm of truth,—and I feel that this elemental power, this exhaustless mind, must have a kindred origin, and that its perpetual inspiration flows from an enduring source.

Two points may be considered here. First, that mind, rather than matter, is the primal fact. I mean

by this that it is the fact which stands nearest us. It is the first thing of which we are conscious; for it *is* consciousness itself. I am sure that I think, although I may not be sure of that about which I think. This inward realm of thoughts and feelings is to me more certain than this outward world which confessedly is colored and shaped by the operations of the mind; which exists for us as it *appears*, rather than as it *is*. And, if this fact thus stands primary in our own experience, we may infer that it thus stands throughout the universe. Eternal mind is a more conceivable and intimate fact than eternal matter.

In the next place, I observe that the world without corresponds to mind, is analogous to mind, appeals to mind, is only truly apprehended by mind. As the written characters in a letter are charged with the meaning of one mind, and convey that meaning to another mind; so as to the characters with which the entire world of nature is inscribed. They express mind, and in that expression are apprehended by mind. The material universe is a series of propositions rendered in facts instead of words. If it were otherwise, it is hardly conceivable why the universe should not be to us the same that it is to the ox or the sparrow, — only a field of locomotion and of sensuous life. Why should nature inspire us to *think*, if thought is not enshrined in it? How could it so readily lead and educate a power which it

has not in itself? Look closely at this point. What are the highest meanings, the highest uses, of the material world? Are they fitted only to an animal perception, — an economy of life and death? Is the earth nothing more than a human cattle-pasture, and heaven a canopy of torch-lights? Is nature a dead screen, on which human fancy paints the enigmas that it thinks it finds there, and projects the very problems that it explores? Or behind that screen is there a Mind, whose splendid processes, whose shadowy mysteries, the human mind detects, and tries to follow out, although it may never fully comprehend them? Again I ask, What is the aspect of the material world? Does it appear only as matter adjusted to matter? or in and through it does thought appeal to thought? — deep calling unto deep.

In this expression of Mind, then, throughout all forms of being, I find the significance of the text. It is more conceivable that the substantial Root of these transient phenomena should be intelligent than that it should be non-intelligent. Our thoughts, perplexed at the best, are compelled to lodge somewhere; and they lodge far more satisfactorily upon the proposition of eternal mind than upon the proposition of eternal matter.

It appears to me, then, that the truth proclaimed in the text is a necessity of reason; that truth is necessary as the foundation of all that appears, — as

the central harmony of all this order, especially as the origin of this faculty of mind in ourselves. Therefore by no means should we regard the declaration of the Psalmist as a mere figure of speech. It is a solid fact which is here proclaimed,—the most veritable of facts. Not only from the harp-strings of this Hebrew singer, swept by the fingers of devout emotion, but from the formulas of demonstration, from the lips of the merely speculative thinker, breaks this confession: “Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting.”

III. But we cannot stop with the consideration of the text as a mere intellectual proposition. After all, it is eminently a *religious* truth. Yet it can be a religious truth for *us* only as it moves us with a consciousness of personal relations with Him whose “throne is established of old, and who is from everlasting.” For religion is distinguished from philosophy in this: it translates the logical statement into a spiritual sentiment. It exhibits this truth of the eternity of God not only as a majestic theme, not only as a necessary fact, but as a moral or spiritual influence for our souls. And this brings me to that special application of the subject which I wish to make at the present time. I say, then, that this truth of God’s eternity, vast as it is, and transcending all finite thought, is, in some sense, a standard for human measurement.

1. I observe then, in the first place, that the truth

declared in the text presents a standard of human *littleness*. Here stretches before us the limitless horizon on which the drama of human life stands out in full relief. Across this disk of absolute being glide all our plans, our pursuits, and the lines of our mortal years. And, compared with this, what are they all? That which we call "a long life," — what is it as it thus flits into nothingness? What are our schemes in which we plunge our hearts and our hopes? What are our achievements, our monuments of brass or granite, when all the ages of the world upon this fathomless deep are but a ripple, a scud of foam? For those lessons of humility and frailty and transitoriness which in our thoughtlessness and our pride we so often need, surely nothing can be so effective as meditation upon the familiar yet unrealized truth here set before us. The moralist or preacher may write his homily in the dust of thickly-strewn graves, or transcribe it from recent tombstones. But we need not only a sense of mutability, but a point of *contrast*. We need to realize, not only that life is short, but *how* short; and for this nothing can be more impressive than the simple and sublime statement of the Psalmist. Nothing is so convincing as to turn our telescope towards this firmament of eternal Being, and see how rapidly each mortal sphere trembles and slips across the meridian wire. Surely this is a standard of transitoriness that inspires us with sudden awe, and shakes us out of our

proud assumptions and our carnal ease; while in this awakened sense of our human littleness we are constrained to cry out, even as we vanish away, "Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting."

2. I remark, again, that the eternity of God is also a standard for human *hope* and *confidence*. For, fleeting as is the measure of our days, to this immutable Being we are bound by imperishable relations. I have spoken of mind, and have inferred from it the existence of a Supreme and Eternal Mind. But now I ask, What must be the nature of this element, that is thus able to conceive that there is such a fact as an Eternal Mind? Of all things else in this visible universe, here is one being, who, amidst the perishing of his possessions, the vanishing of his hopes, and his own swift passage through this mortal state, is able to look up with an instinct of the Infinite, and cry out, "Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting." And I argue that such a being, weak and transitory as he is, must hold special relations to that Supreme Mind. It appears to me that in this fact alone there is ground for hope and confidence in humanity. There would be ground for such hope and confidence if only this utterance, this Bible-scrap, had been thrown out from the mind and the heart of man in his passage through time; if only by this narrow strip of writing it had been made evident that man, in all his limitations and

sins, had looked up from this earth on which his feet were placed, and uttered the conception expressed in the text. Surely a nature, however perishable its environments, that can conceive such a truth, must have special alliance with that truth; is, in some sense, a participant in it.

And it is so. The eternity of God assures our own imperishableness. Of all created things here below, changing and passing away, we in our essential peculiarity abide. Among all these forms of nature, us, atoms of mortality, God gathers up, and never loses. "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living." All the generations that have been swept from the earth are before him, held in reservation,—held in perpetual life. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, gone we cannot tell whither, dwelling we know not where,—he sees them all. The long file of heroes and martyrs, good men and true men, and patient sufferers, and humble toilers, and husbands and wives; dear relationships of every kind; souls eloquent with genius and strong with virtue, long since hidden from our sight; gray grandsires left out until frost, and sweet babes that have bowed to the sickle like violets in June, and have been mixed in with shocks of corn fully ripe,—all these have been gathered into the relentless garner. Nay, the poor castaways, the unregarded dwellers in nooks and dark places of the earth,—crusted and battered coins, yet with the divine image and super-

scription not utterly effaced from them, — every atom of a soul, every fibre of the general humanity, he has gathered up, he will keep. Living once, they live forever. Because he lives, they shall live also. A child once born to us is our child forever. The love born with it will never die. Death may early dash its cold wave on the little face. But here it hangs in the gallery of the soul. We keep a place for it, and know that it is no vain image, but the reflection of what really exists in heaven. Nay, not even *moral* death can cancel a child's claim upon us. Debasement and guilt cannot cover it up so that it will not be *our* child. No sentence of excommunication can write its final epitaph, or set up a gravestone for it in our hearts. Brethren, am I not permitted to argue from the less to the greater? I must conceive the Eternal God as so loving and caring for all his children. Once created, they are forever his. His love, flowing out to them, never ceases; and so he will not let them drop into annihilation, but takes them up, and holds them secure in his own eternity. Truly, then, when we say, "Thy throne is established of old, thou art from everlasting," we proclaim a great truth for human hope and consolation.

With this great light of God's eternity shining around us as we move along, and with the thought that in the bosom of that eternity he gathers up all losses, all waifs, and keeps safely the departed who

have floated out of our sight, there is also reason for patience.

Yes, withal, let us be patient. "God is patient because he is eternal;" and we may learn to be patient in proportion as we realize our share in that eternity, — patient with this swift-flying time, that will not let us rest, but hurries us through the precious years; patient with this transient suffering and loss; patient with any special affliction, considering that it is only a part of a transcendent scheme. For there is scope for human hope and confidence in that truth, — "Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting."

3. The text presents a standard of *personal responsibility*. Among all the interests of life, among all that claims our love or tempts our desire, this throne that is established of old demands our supreme homage. The criterion of all our conduct is the will of Him who is from everlasting. Our temptations largely spring from *customs* and *expedients*. Human policies easily entangle us. The attraction of profit or of reputation draws us from the true orbit of our lives. We are impelled to smother our convictions; forgetting that allegiance to truth is allegiance to God, and disloyalty to the one is disloyalty to the other. Let us beware, then, how we bring our allegiance to the shambles, or put a trade-mark upon conscience. Above all, in the light of the great truth which we have been considering,

let us always feel how close in our naked personality we stand to Him who is thus from everlasting. And, in this relation, what is the report of the closing year? To Him we owe praise and honor. Have we rendered praise and honor? We are called to fulfil his purpose in our lives, and how have we lived? He has not dwelt apart from us, making his demands as an absolute Sovereign. He has drawn near to us as an eternal Father. He has broken through the veil of our earthly life; and given us tokens of his love and his solicitude in Jesus Christ. How have we treated these tokens? and with what posture of our hearts do we answer back? These are questions for the present hour, and for all the hours of our lives. Our highest blessedness, our supreme end, is in reconciliation with Him whose "throne is established of old, who is from everlasting." All that we are required to bear, all that we are called to do, expresses the will of Eternal Goodness. Here, standing on the vanishing edge of the year,—amidst the sins and sorrows of the past, amidst the uncertainties of the future,—there is guidance for our footsteps, and there is inspiration for our work.

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
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